

NACAC

State of College Admission

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR COLLEGE ADMISSION COUNSELING

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NACAC

AUTHORS:

David A. Hawkins
Director of Public Policy
NACAC

Jessica Lautz
Research Assistant
NACAC

Includes special research
supplements by:

Patricia M. McDonough
Professor, Department of Education
University of California, Los Angeles

William G. Tierney
*Wilbur Kiefer Professor of Higher
Education and Director, Center for
Higher Education Policy Analysis*
University of Southern California

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NACAC
1631 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

(800) 822-6285
(703) 836-8015 fax

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Introduction

This report is an amalgamation of data from four separate sources. The first source is NACAC's annual Counseling Trends Survey, conducted in May 2004. The purpose of this survey is to poll counselors in high schools to discover trends in their work responsibilities, particularly regarding college counseling, and to assess trends that affect students making the transition from high school to college. The second is NACAC's Admission Trends Survey, conducted in August 2004. The purpose of this survey is to poll college admission officers to determine what factors are most important in the admission decision and to assess trends in admission office functions, staff, budget, and operations. More information about these two surveys is included below. The third source is the Common Data Set, which NACAC licensed for aggregate use from the College Board. The final source of data is the federal government, including data from the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Counseling Trends Survey: Response Rate and Respondent Profile

In May 2004, NACAC distributed the Counseling Trends Survey questionnaire by mail to the guidance offices of its 1,750 member high schools and to 3,000 non-member public high schools across the United States. The 3,000 non-member schools were selected by random sample using

a list of all public high schools from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data.

Of the 1,057 respondents to the Counseling Trends Survey (a response rate of 22 percent), 64 percent are employed in public institutions, 23 percent in private parochial schools, and 13 percent in private non-parochial schools. In the United States as a whole, there are 39,545 schools that include secondary grade levels.¹ Of the 39,545 secondary schools in the United States, 72 percent are public (28,884) and 28 percent are private (10,661). Of the 10,661 private schools that include secondary grades in the United States, 69 percent (7,304) are religiously-affiliated (also described as parochial), while 22 percent (2,355) are non-sectarian. Nine percent (1,003) of private schools did not provide information about their affiliation to the U.S. Department of Education.² (See Table 1)

Respondents reported a near even-split on demographic location, 31 percent are located in urban areas, 31 percent are located in suburban areas, and 39 percent are located in rural areas. Nationally, approximately 28 percent of all schools are located in urban areas, 35 percent in suburban areas, and 37 percent in rural areas.

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics 2003*. (Tables 60 and 92). Washington, DC.

Includes all schools with secondary grade levels, including special education schools, vocational schools, and alternative schools.

² *Ibid.* Table 60

Table 1. NACAC Counseling Trends Survey respondent characteristics compared to national secondary school characteristics (in parentheses), 2004.

| | All NACAC Respondents | All National | Public NACAC Respondents | Public National | Private, Non-Parochial NACAC Respondents | Private, Non-Parochial National | Private Parochial NACAC Respondents | Private Parochial National |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Total percent of schools | 100% | (100%) | 64% | (73%) | 23% | (6%) | 13% | (19%) |
| Demographic | | | | | | | | |
| Urban ¹ | 31 | (28) | 18 | (25) | 49 | (43) | 62 | (39) |
| Suburban ² | 31 | (35) | 30 | (34) | 30 | (42) | 34 | (37) |
| Rural ³ | 39 | (37) | 52 | (42) | 21 | (15) | 5 | (24) |
| Enrollment | | | | | | | | |
| Fewer than 500 students | 32 | n/a ⁴ | 23 | 58 ⁵ | 58 | n/a | 31 | n/a |
| 500 to 999 | 29 | n/a | 25 | 18 | 33 | n/a | 40 | n/a |
| 1,000 to 1,499 | 17 | n/a | 19 | 11 | 7 | n/a | 23 | n/a |
| 1,500 to 1,999 | 13 | n/a | 19 | 7 | 2 | n/a | 2 | n/a |
| More than 2,000 | 10 | n/a | 15 | 6 | 0 | n/a | 3 | n/a |

Sources: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004; *Digest of Education Statistics, 2003*, Tables 58, 60, 88, and 93; *Overview of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools and Districts: School Year 2001-02*, Table 8.

The largest percentage (32 percent) of respondents to the Counseling Trends Survey enroll fewer than 500 students; 29 percent of respondents enroll between 500-999 students; 17 percent of institutions enroll between 1000-1499 students; 13 percent of institutions enroll between 1500-1999 students; 10 percent of institutions are attended by more than 2,000 students. Nationally, almost 60 percent of all public schools that include grade 12 enroll fewer than 500 students. Ninety-six percent of all private schools enroll fewer than 750 students.³

NACAC Admission Trends Survey

In October 2004, NACAC distributed The Admission Trends Survey to its 1,540 member colleges and universities. Of the 661 responses (a response rate of 43 percent), 34 percent were public institutions, while 66 percent were private institutions. Nationally, 41 percent of postsecondary institutions are public, while 59 percent are private. (See Table 2 for comparison of Admission Trends Survey respondents to national postsecondary institution characteristics.)

Since the NACAC survey is distributed only to NACAC member institutions, and since NACAC member institutions are predominantly four-year institutions, survey responses are more representative of the national population of four-year institutions than the national population of all postsecondary institutions. As data in Table 2 indicates, The NACAC Survey is representative of the sizes of enrollment though slightly over representative of private colleges.

³ United States Department of Education, Common Core of Data (2001–02 school year) Washington, DC., for public school data; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics, 2003*, (Table 58). Washington, DC., for private school data.

⁴ Calculation for national totals based on the number of schools classified by U.S. Department of Education as being located in community type “large city” and “midsize city” (public) and “central city” (private).

⁵ Calculation for national totals based on the number of schools classified by U.S. Department of Education as being located in community type “small town” and “rural” (public) and “large town” (public) and “urban fringe/large town” (private).

⁶ Calculation for national totals based on the number of schools classified by U.S. Department of Education as being located in community type “small town” and “rural” (public) and “rural/small town” (private).

⁷ Note: Private school data unavailable in this enrollment format. As stated in text above, 96 percent of private schools enroll fewer than 750 students.

⁸ Public school enrollment percentages based on number of schools with grade span that includes 12th grade.

⁹ New England—Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island
Middle States—New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, District of Columbia
South—Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida
Midwest—Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas
Southwest—Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico
West—Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado

Table 2. NACAC Admission Trends Survey respondent characteristics and national college/university characteristics (in parentheses), 2004.

| | All NACAC Respondents | All National Colleges | Public NACAC Respondents | Public Colleges National | Private NACAC Respondents | Private Colleges National |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Total | 100% | (100%) | 34% | (41%) | 66% | (59%) |
| Type | | | | | | |
| Two-year | 9 | (44) | 20 | (64) | 4 | (30) |
| Four-year | 91 | (56) | 80 | (36) | 96 | (70) |
| Enrollment* | | | | | | |
| Under 3,000 | 68 | (66) | 25 | (28) | 84 | (84) |
| 3,000-4,999 | 13 | (11) | 21 | (17) | 10 | (8) |
| 5,000-9,999 | 13 | (11) | 30 | (24) | 6 | (5) |
| 10,000-14,999 | 2 | (5) | 8 | (12) | 0 | (2) |
| 15,000-19,999 | 2 | (3) | 7 | (8) | 0 | (1) |
| 20,000+ | 3 | (4) | 10 | (11) | 0 | (0) |
| Region[†] | | | | | | |
| New England | 13 | (7) | 11 | (5) | 15 | (10) |
| Middle States | 21 | (18) | 20 | (14) | 22 | (23) |
| South | 18 | (22) | 19 | (23) | 17 | (20) |
| Midwest | 30 | (27) | 29 | (26) | 31 | (28) |
| Southwest | 4 | (9) | 5 | (11) | 4 | (6) |
| West | 14 | (17) | 17 | (20) | 12 | (13) |

Sources: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004; *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2003, Table 246; *IPEDS Peer Analysis System: includes four-year, non-profit, Title IV eligible colleges only, 2001; Common Data Set 2003-2004.

Executive Summary

Highlights from the 2004–05 State of College Admission report include the following findings pertaining to the transition from high school to postsecondary education in the United States.

Special supplement to the 2004 State of College Admission report:

In 2004, the National Association for College Admission Counseling commissioned two white papers to provide an overview of college counseling in schools and of the landscape of college admission. These two forward-looking papers are published as a special supplement to the 2004–05 State of College Admission report. The titles of the papers, are:

- “Counseling and College Counseling in America’s High Schools,” by Patricia M. McDonough, Professor of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles
- “The Changing Landscape of Higher Education: The Future of College Admission,” by William G. Tierney, Wilbur Kieffer Professor of Higher Education and Director, Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, University of Southern California

High School Graduates/College Enrollments

- In 2004, three million students graduated from high school in the United States. Slightly more than 60 percent of them applied to and enrolled in postsecondary education, either two- or four-year institutions.
- A total of just over 15 million students were enrolled in postsecondary education, an all-time high. Both numbers—high school graduates and college enrollments—are expected to increase until at least 2010.

- White students are more likely than average to graduate from high school and enroll in college, while black and Hispanic students are less likely than average to do the same. The gap is most pronounced at four-year colleges, where blacks and Hispanics constitute only 17 percent of the undergraduate population, even though together they constitute 31 percent of the national college-age population.

Applications to College

- In 2004, the number of institutions reporting increased applications decreased slightly from 2003. Sixty-seven percent of institutions reported an increase in applications, down slightly from 71 percent in 2003.
- The average selectivity rate, or percentage of applicants offered admission, for colleges and universities in the United States is 71 percent.
- The average “yield” rate, or percentage of admitted students who enroll at the institution, is 50 percent.

Admission Strategies

- Sixteen percent of colleges and universities offer early admission; 10 percent offering Early Decision and eight percent offering Early Action.

- For the first time since 2000, the “rate of increase” in the volume of applications received through early decision slowed in 2003. Forty-three percent of early decision colleges reported an increase in ED applications, while 24 percent reported a decrease. In the previous three years, between 50 and 60 percent of ED colleges reported increased ED applications, while only around 15 percent reported a decrease.
- The selectivity rate for ED applicants was nearly identical to the selectivity rate under regular admission at ED colleges in 2004.
- For the first time since 2000, a larger number of institutions (45 percent) reported a *decrease* in Early Decision applications than reported an increase (37 percent).
- The number of institutions that reported a decrease in Early Action applications tripled from 2003 to 2004. In 2003, 10 percent of institutions reported a decrease in EA applications from the previous year. In 2004, 37 percent of institutions reported a decrease from the previous year.
- Thirty-four percent of colleges and universities maintain a wait list. More colleges (52 percent) reported an increased number of students on the wait list than any year since 1999. On average, 27 percent of students are accepted from wait lists.

Factors in the Admission Decision

- The factors used to evaluate applications for admission in 2003 remained consistent with previous years. The top factors in the admission decision continued to be grades in college prep courses, standardized admission tests, average overall grade point average.
- The most highly selective colleges (those accepting less than 50 percent of applicants) were more likely to attribute a higher level of importance to all factors in the admission decision than less selective colleges.
- In 2004, the application essay was valued as equally important as a student’s rank in class by colleges and universities. This marks a convergence point in a ten-year trend in which class rank has declined and the essay has risen in importance as a factor in the admission process.
- A student’s demonstrated interest in attending an institution is an important “tip” factor in the college admission decision. More than half of all colleges consider a student’s interest in the institution during the admission process.
- Standardized test scores, transcripts/grade summaries and confirmation of competency in minimum course requirements were the top three requirements of homeschooled students in the admission process.

School Counselors and College Counseling

- According to the U.S. Department of Education, the ratio of students to counselors in all public schools nationally has declined slightly, from 485:1 in 2002 to 478:1 in 2004.

- The average counselor respondent to NACAC's Counseling Trends Survey spent less than half (39 percent) of their work week engaged in college counseling. The remainder of the week was spent on academic advising and course selection (21 percent), social/psychological/personal counseling (16 percent), test administration or evaluation (12 percent), occupational counseling and job placement (6 percent), and other non-guidance activities (6 percent).
- Counseling Trends data also revealed statistically significant correlation indicating that when an increased focus was placed on administrative and test proctoring duties by high school counselors it resulted in a decrease in the amount of students participating in postsecondary education after high school.

Admission Office Budget and Staff

- On average, non-profit colleges spent \$432 to recruit each applicant for admission in 2004.
- On average, it cost \$33 to apply to college at a four-year non-profit institution.
- The drive to attract students also affects the knowledge and skills that admission offices seek in potential admission officers. Just over 70 percent of colleges and universities stated that "marketing and public relations" was a very important skill for potential hires. The ability to interpret data and perform statistical analysis and good personnel/resource management skills were cited by half of institutions as being "very important."

Paying for College and Financial Aid

- Thirty-five percent of all undergraduate students receive federal need-based grant aid, such as the Pell grant.
- Over the past 10 years, a 44 percent growth in state need-based financial aid for college has been overshadowed by a 229 percent increase in non-need based aid.

Counselors and admission officers spend significant portions of their time providing information about paying for college to students. Both are seen by parents, schools and students as professionals who are expected to answer questions about financial aid.

Chapter 1. High School Graduation and College Enrollment

CONTENTS

- High School Graduation
- High School Graduation Rate
- Immediate Transition to College
- Overall Enrollment in College
- Racial/Ethnic, Socio-Economic, and Gender Gap

High School Graduation

How do we measure educational success in the United States? Graduating from high school constitutes one indicator of that success. It is both a terminal point for compulsory public education and an acknowledgement that students have completed an educational curriculum that was designed to provide them a baseline set of skills for success in life.

In 2004–05, postsecondary education is viewed as a necessity for success in the 21st century economy.¹ With postsecondary education such an essential component of successful American life in the 21st century, success in graduating students from high school is a necessary precursor to all other indicators of success beyond high school.

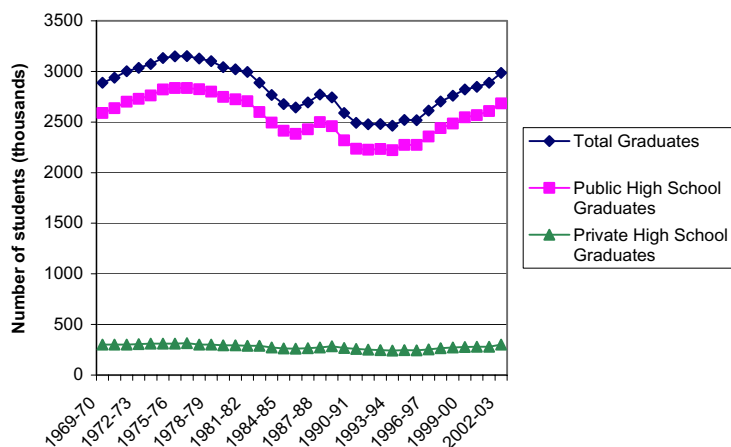
Increasing Number of Students Graduating from High School

The number of students graduating from high schools, both public and private, in the U.S. has increased each year since 1995–96. Between 1996–97 and 2002–03, the number of students graduating from high school increased 14 percent, from 2.6 million to almost 3.0 million students. Put in an historical perspective, however, the number of high school graduates is only reflective of general increases in the U.S. population, not of a significant increase in the percentage of students who graduate each year. The number of students who graduated from high school in 2003 is nearly equal (2.986 million) to the number of high school graduates in 1972 (3.002 million). In fact, the number of high school graduates peaked in 1976–77 at 3.15 million.² See Figure 1)

¹ Camevak, A. (2000) *Help Wanted... College Required*. Leadership 2000 Series. Princeton, NJ. ETS.

² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics, 2003*, (Tables 102). Washington, DC.

Figure 1. Number of students who graduated from high school, 1970-2003.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics 2003*, Table 102.

The U.S. Department of Education predicts that this trend will continue until at least 2009. The Department of Education estimates that 3.037 million students will graduate in 2005. The number of graduates is expected to increase from 3.0 million in 2004–05 to nearly 3.3 million in 2009, after which numbers are projected to decrease due to population fluctuations.³

Percentage of Students Finishing High School Remains Constant

The percentage of the “college-age” population completing high school has remained relatively constant since 1970. (See Figure 2) Depending on the estimate, between 71 and 86 percent of college-age individuals have completed high school.

The Department of Education’s data show that in 1970, 77 percent of 17-year olds in the U.S. graduated high school. In 2002, the department estimates that only 72 percent of 17-year olds graduated from high school.⁴ When the department has examined the high school completion rate for individuals between the ages of 18-24, which makes allowances for completions other than graduation (like success in passing the requirements for the GED), it has found that the completion rate has risen from around 83 percent in 1972 to roughly 87 percent in 2001.⁵

From these data, it is difficult to determine whether the United States is having more or less success in preparing students for education after high school. Are we faced with a perpetual ceiling on graduation rates? Will ten percent of students always drop out of high school? How can we account for the continuing increase in postsecondary educational enrollment, despite seemingly flat high school completion rates? A few answers to these questions may be obtained through improved data collection.

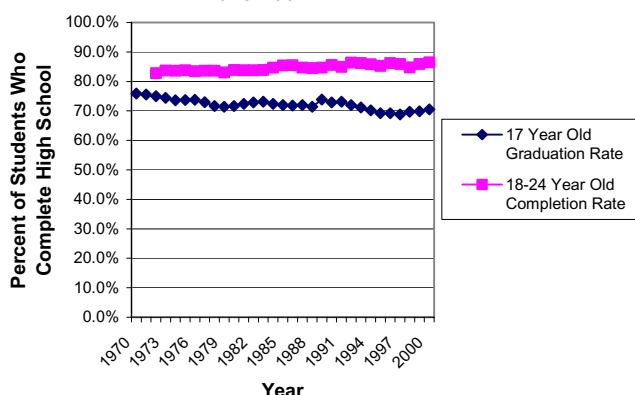
In October 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics asked the National Institute of Statistical Sciences and the Education Statistics Services Institute to assemble a task force of research and policy experts to study current high school graduation, completion and dropout data indicators,

³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). *Projections of Education Statistics to 2013*, (Table 23.) Washington, DC.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics, 2003*, (Table 102). Washington, DC.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2001, November). *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2001*, (Table A7, p. 40).

Figure 2. High school graduation/completion rates, 1970-2001.



Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Dropout Rates in the United States: 2001*, Table A7, p.40, and *Digest of Education Statistics: 2003*, Table 102.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, National Institute of Statistical Sciences and National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). *National Institute of Statistical Science/Education Statistics Services Institute Task Force on Graduation, Completion, and Dropout Indicators*. Washington, DC.
⁷ Mortensen, T. (2001, October). Graph titled: High school graduation rate by family income quartile for dependent 18–24 year olds. *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*.

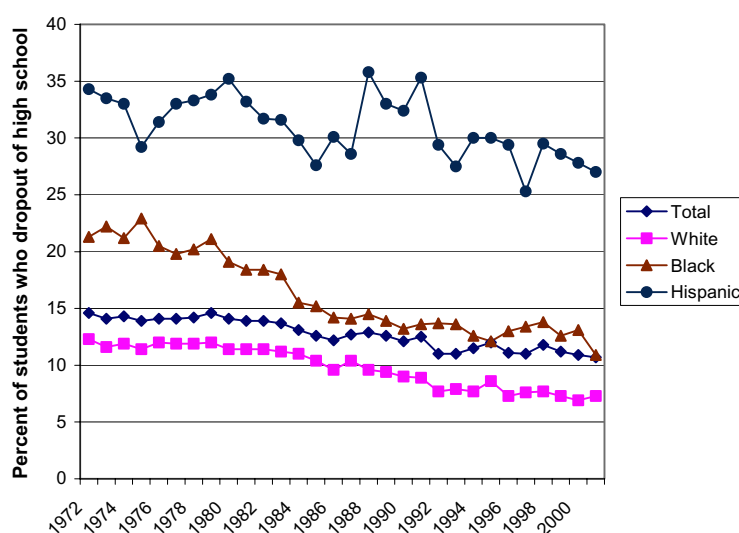
and recommend improvements. Because of data collection disparities among the thousands of school districts and 50 states, the federal government, through this task force, seeks to standardize data to more accurately determine the path of students through high school. What may be counted as a “dropout” in one school district may be reported as a transfer in another, and the disparity may never be detected by either district, by the state, or by the federal government for data purposes. The “National Institute of Statistical Science/Education Statistics Services Institute Task Force on Graduation, Completion, and Dropout Indicators,” provides a number of recommended improvements, including an on-time graduation rate, completion rate, transfer rate, and dropout rate.⁶ However, as high school dropout data indicate, the “ceiling” on high school completion is due in large part to a persistent though declining dropout rate.

High School Completion by Race and Ethnicity

Over a 30-year period (1972–2002), the overall dropout rate has declined by about four points (from 15 percent to just under 11 percent). Moreover, significant gaps in high school completion persist between socio-economic groups. Just 65 percent of students from the lowest-income quartile graduate from high school, compared to 95 percent of students from the highest quartile.⁷

Hispanic and black students are more likely to dropout of high school than the national average. As data from the U.S. Department of Education show, the dropout rate for all students has declined, but the rates for black and Hispanic students remain high. The dropout rate for Hispanic students in 2001 was 27 percent, the dropout rate for blacks was 11 percent, and the dropout rate for white students was seven percent.

Figure 3. Dropout rate by race/ethnicity, 1972-2001.



Source: *Condition of Education, 2002*, United States Department of Education, Indicator 19 (2002).

Making the Transition: From High School Graduate to College Student

Postsecondary Enrollment by High School Completers

While the number of high school graduates has fluctuated in the last two decades, the percentage of high school graduates going on to college immediately after high school has increased steadily since 1976. (See Figure 4)

These numbers include students who complete high school by graduating in four years with a diploma, and also those who pursue alternate means of completion, such as passing the GED.

According to NACAC's 2004 Counseling Trends Survey, students at small, private high schools are much more likely to enroll in postsecondary education than students from large, public high schools. Findings from the NACAC Counseling Trends survey are generally

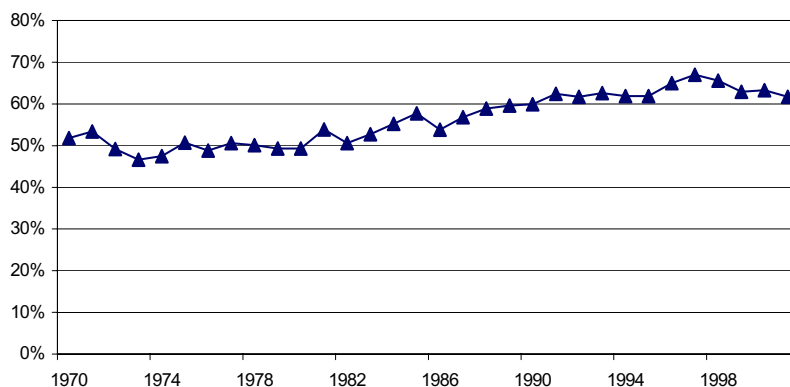
over-representative of private high schools, and overstate the total percent of students enrolling in postsecondary education, particularly at four-year institutions. However, data reveal distinct, statistically significant differences between high schools that can be interpreted as being representative of the differences between such high schools nationally.

Enrollment Rates of High School Completers by Race/Ethnicity

As with high school graduates, there are significant and persistent gaps in postsecondary enrollment between racial/ethnic groups and socio-economic groups. Among high school graduates nationally, black and Hispanic students are less likely than white students to enroll in postsecondary education, as Figure 5 shows.

Moreover, for the past 30 years, high school graduates from the top income quartile have enrolled in college at a rate 25–30 percentage points higher than students from the lowest income quartile.⁸

Figure 4. Percent of recent high school completers enrolled in degree-granting institutions, 1970-2001.



Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2003 (Table 185).

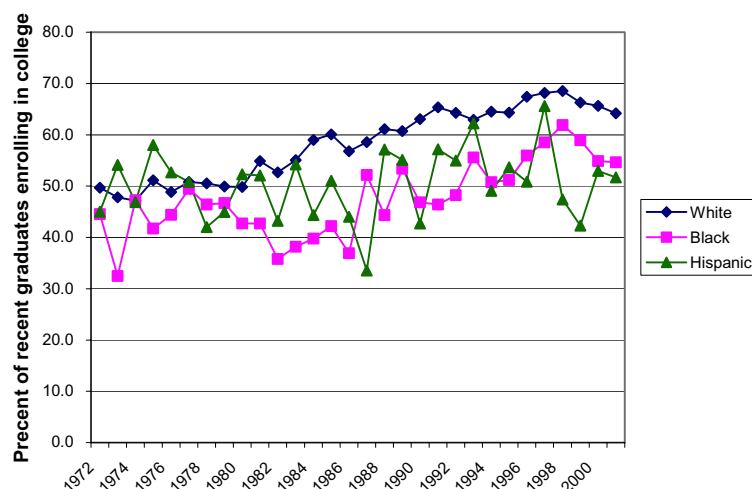
⁸ Mortensen, T. (2001a, October). Graph titled: College continuation rates by family income quartiles for dependent 18-24 year-old high school graduates. Postsecondary Education Opportunity.

Table 3. Mean enrollment in postsecondary education of high school graduates from NACAC Counseling Trends respondent schools, 2004.

| | Percent of students enrolled in four-year institution | Percent of students enrolled in two-year institution |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| All schools | 66.8 | 20.8% |
| Control | | |
| Public | 52.0 | 26.7 |
| All Private | 92.3 | 7.7 |
| <i>Private Non-Parochial</i> | 95.1 | 4.6 |
| <i>Private Parochial</i> | 87.5 | 11.9 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | |
| 0 to 25% of students eligible (OSE) | 75.0 | 17.8 |
| 26 to 50% | 42.5 | 29.5 |
| 51 to 100% | 37.6 | 28.3 |
| Enrollment | | |
| Fewer than 500 students | 71.0 | 18.9 |
| 500 to 999 students | 70.8 | 17.4 |
| 1,000 to 1,499 students | 65.2 | 20.7 |
| 1,500 to 1,999 students | 59.0 | 25.8 |
| More than 2,000 | 52.6 | 30.0 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 85.1 | 11.5 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 77.9 | 16.6 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 65.8 | 20.6 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 55.6 | 25.8 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 56.8 | 25.4 |
| More than 500:1 | 59.6 | 21.1 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

Figure 5. College enrollment rates of recent high school graduates by race, 1972-2001.



Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 2003 (Table 185).

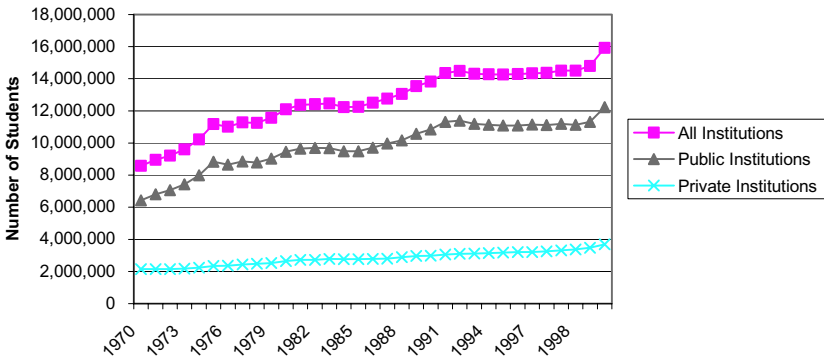
Overall Enrollment in College

The total number of students enrolled in postsecondary education has increased steadily over the past 30 years.⁹ As Figure 6 shows, a substantial amount of the overall enrollment growth is taking place at public institutions of postsecondary education.

The growth in enrollment has nearly been matched by growth in the number of postsecondary institutions. Since 1974, enrollment in postsecondary institutions has grown by 50 percent, while the number of institutions that are accredited and eligible to receive federal financial aid has increased by 40 percent.¹¹

⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics, 2003*, (Tables 175). Washington, DC.
¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). *Projections of Education Statistics to 2013*. Washington, DC.
¹¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics, 2003*, (Tables 175 and 246). Washington, DC.

Figure 6. Enrollment in postsecondary institutions, 1970-2001.

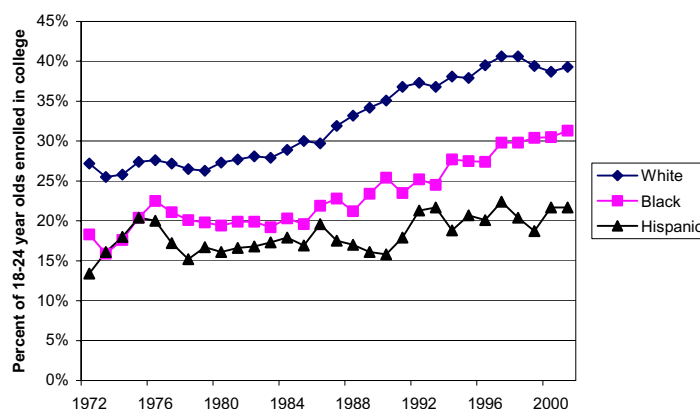


Source: *Digest of Education Statistics, 2003*, Table 175.

Table 4. Change in enrollment at postsecondary institutions, 2003-2013.

| | Five-Year Change in Enrollment | Ten-Year Change in Enrollment |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| All institutions | +5% | +10% |
| Public four-year | +5% | +11% |
| Private four-year | +5% | +11% |
| Public two-year | +4% | +9% |
| Private two-year | +6% | +10% |

Source: *Projections of Education Statistics to 2013*, Tables 14-18 (Middle alternative projections).

Figure 7. College enrollment rates of all 18-24 year olds by race, 1972-2001.

Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2003 (Table 188).

As with high school graduation and the direct transition from high school to college, there are persistent gaps between racial/ethnic and socio-economic groups in the percent of the population aged 18–24 that are enrolled in postsecondary education.

Overall Postsecondary Enrollment of Population Age 18–24 by Race/Ethnicity

The disparity among racial and ethnic groups is significantly wider when we examine the entire college-age population, rather than only those with a high school diploma. (See Figure 7)

Postsecondary Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Type of Institution

Although minority enrollment in postsecondary education is becoming slightly more reflective of the national population, there are still stark inequities in enrollment at four-year colleges and universities. While African Americans and Hispanics together constitute 31 percent of the American population, they represent only 18 percent of students enrolled at four-year colleges and universities.¹² (See Table 5)

¹² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2003, (Table 210). Washington, DC.; U.S. Census Bureau, (2003, July). National Population Estimates. (Table 3). Washington, DC.

Table 5. White, Black and Hispanic enrollment in postsecondary education in comparison with population share, 2000.

| | White, non-Hispanic | Black, non-Hispanic | Hispanic |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Percent of total population aged 18-24 | 62.0 | 14.0 | 17.3% |
| Percent of racial/ethnic group enrolled in postsecondary education: | | | |
| All postsecondary education | 67.6 | 11.6 | 9.8 |
| Public Institutions | 67.1 | 11.4 | 10.7 |
| Private Institutions | 69.3 | 12.3 | 6.8 |
| Four-Year Institutions | 70.5 | 10.9 | 6.8 |
| Two-Year Institutions | 63.3 | 12.7 | 14.5 |

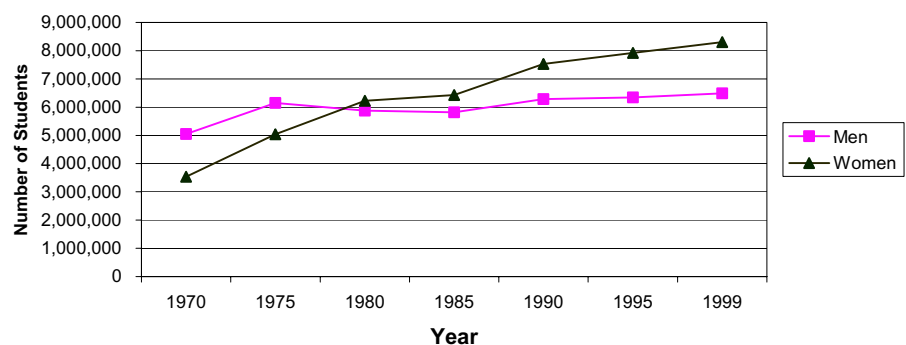
Sources: *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2003, Table 210; U.S. Census Bureau, National Population Estimates, July 1, 2002, Table 3.

College Enrollment by Gender

Over the past 30 years, the number of women participating in postsecondary education has increased significantly. (See Figure 8) NACAC's 2004 Admission Trends survey indicates that this trend is likely to continue in 2004–05. During the 2003–04 admission cycle 66 percent of colleges and universities reported receiving more applications from female prospective students than males. Fifteen percent reported receiving more applications from males, and 16 percent reported receiving about the same number from each gender.¹³ The only significant difference observed between disaggregated groups was that private, four-year institutions were particularly more likely than average to report more applications from females than males.

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA attributes this trend and other changes in the goals and choices of college-age females to the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. According to HERI's "The American Freshman: Thirty-Five Year Trends" report, the women's rights movement sparked an historic increase in the number of women enrolling in higher education. That increase continued through the 1990s, and is fueled by consistently high expectations for achievement among women. The HERI reports that "the increasing educational aspirations of young women in this country are reflected not only in their greater interest in postgraduate degrees, but also in their increasing interest simply in attending college."¹⁴

Figure 8. College enrollment by gender, 1970-2000.



Source: US Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2003 (Table 176).

¹³ Three percent reported "not applicable," in the case of single-sex institutions.

¹⁴ Astin, A.W., Oseguera, L., Sax, L.J., Korn, W.S. (2002). *The American Freshman: Thirty-Five Year Trends*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

As shown in Table 6, 55 percent of applicants to four-year colleges were female in 2001. Fifty-seven percent of students admitted to college in 2001 were women and 55 percent of students who enrolled in college were female. Chapter 2 explores application trends by gender in greater detail.

A Note About Completion

In 2003, the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) provided an assessment of the path students take from enrollment in college to completion. The following is a summary of their results:

- 51 percent of students attained a bachelor's degree at the institution where they first enrolled (within a six-year period)
- Seven percent were still enrolled after six years
- 16 percent left the institution with no degree and did not transfer
- 26 percent transferred to another institution

Of the 26 percent of students who transfer, eight percent obtain their bachelor's degree within six years, 12 percent drop out with no degree, and seven percent remain enrolled beyond the six year time period normally afforded an "on time" graduation.¹⁵

Table 6. Percent of applicants, admitted students, and enrolled students by gender, 2001.

| | Total | Male | Female |
|--------------------------------|--------|------|--------|
| Applied to 4-year Institution | 100.0% | 44.6 | 55.4 |
| Admitted to 4-year Institution | 100.0 | 43.5 | 56.5 |
| Enrolled at 4-year Institution | 100.0 | 44.9 | 55.1 |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *IPEDS Peer Analysis System: includes four-year, non-profit, Title IV eligible colleges only, 2001.

¹⁵ U.S. General Accounting Office. (2003, May). *College Completion: Additional Efforts Could Help Education with Its Completion Goals*, Report Number GAO 03-568. Washington, DC.

Chapter 2. Applications to College

CONTENTS

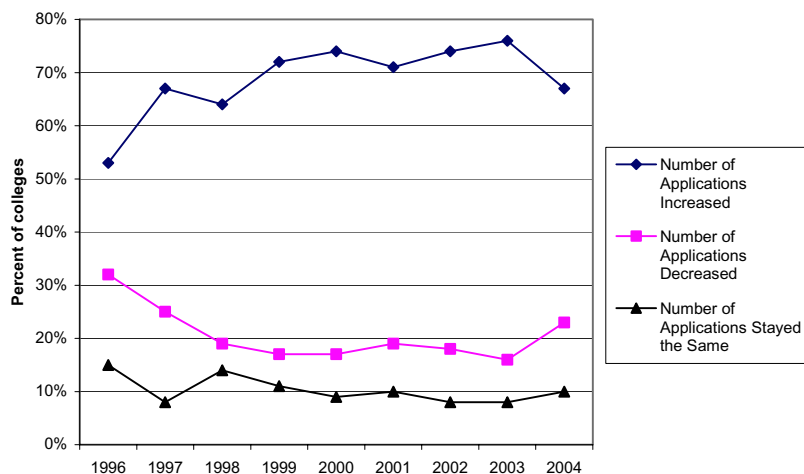
- Application Change Over Time
- Selectivity and Yield
- The Admission “Interface”
- How Colleges Notify Students of the Admission Decision
- Cost of Applying to College
- How Students Prepare for the College Application Process
- Campus Visits
- Gender Trends in College Applications
- International Applications

Application Change Over Time

Is the application wave beginning to crest? While two-thirds of colleges and universities continue to report increases in college applications received, there appears to be a reduction in the rate of increase of applications from 2003 to 2004. As will be detailed in Chapter 3, there has been a substantial drop off in applications to many Early Decision institutions. Similarly, the number of applications submitted by international students appears to be on the decline.

Colleges continued to be inundated with applications from prospective students in the 2003–04 admission cycle. Sixty-seven percent of colleges and universities reported that they had received more applications in 2003–04 than in the previous year. However, for the first year since 1999, the number of institutions reporting an increase in applications declined. (See Figure 9)

Figure 9. College estimates of application change from 1996–2004.



Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

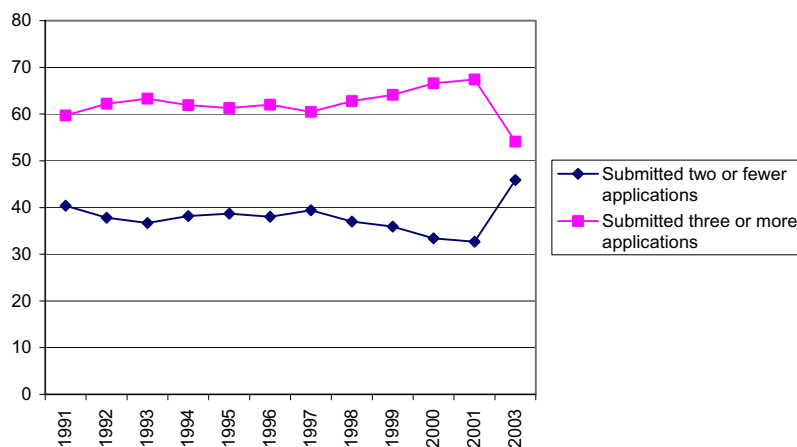
Noteworthy differences among colleges in 2004

- Private colleges (71 percent) were slightly more likely to report increased applications than public colleges (61 percent).
- Highly selective colleges (72 percent) were more likely to report an application increase than the least selective colleges (59 percent).

According to the Higher Education Research Institute, students have been submitting an increasing number of applications since 1997.¹ The number of students submitting three or more college applications has risen nearly 10 percentage points in the past six years. The beginning of this trend roughly corresponds with the proliferation of the use of the Internet in college admission.

The data above suggest that the slight dip in the number of institutions reporting application increases may, in part, be due to a change in student behavior. Figure 10 indicates a dramatic drop-off in the number of students who submit three or more applications to college. Considering that three million students graduated, two-thirds (two million) of whom transitioned directly to college, the change from 2002 to 2003 could have resulted in a decrease of 320,000 applications.

Figure 10. Percent of students submitting more/less than two college applications, 1990-2003.



¹ Astin, A.W., Oseguera, L., Sax, L.J., Korn, W.S. (2002). *The American Freshman: Thirty-Five Year Trends*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Source: *The American Freshman: Thirty-Five Year Trends*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA; *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2003*, Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Selectivity and Yield

How selective are U.S. colleges and universities?

In American higher education, “more selective” admission translates almost universally into “better college” in many people’s minds. Existing research, however, shows that it is not so much which college you attend, but what you do with your education while you are in college that makes the most difference.² Similarly, a college education—regardless of the college—is the keystone to higher income and financial success in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2000, male and female college graduates earned 60 and 95 percent more, respectively, than those who completed only high school or a General Education Development Certificate (GED).³

Nevertheless, a great deal of attention is focused on getting into the “best colleges” as measured by institutional selectivity, a zeitgeist that is fed by media publications, such as *U.S. News & World Report*, that have staked a claim to ranking colleges in the United States.

In the language of college admission, selectivity is the percent of applicants who are offered admission to a college or university.

$$\text{Selectivity} = \frac{\text{Number of acceptances}}{\text{Number of applications}}$$

According to U.S. Department of Education data, the average selectivity rate for colleges and universities in the United States is 71 percent, meaning that colleges accepted seven out of every ten applicants for admission.⁴ Table 7 provides mean selectivity rates broken down by institutional characteristics.

An equally important, though less-well-known statistic, is the institutional “yield” rate. The yield rate reveals the percentage of accepted students who elect to attend the institution. At colleges and universities nationwide, admission officers and enrollment managers conduct elaborate analyses of and outreach to applicants and accepted student pools to enhance the likelihood that students will attend their institutions.

$$\text{Yield} = \frac{\text{Number of enrollments}}{\text{Number of acceptances}}$$

According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, the mean yield rate for colleges and universities in the United States was 50 percent. The public perception of yield often manifests itself in conversations about “safety schools”—schools at which students are likely to be accepted, but will not attend if they are accepted into a “better” (i.e., more selective) school. As with selectivity, yield plays a major role in defining an institution’s public stature, as evidenced by the fact that until 2003, *U.S. News & World Report* used it as part of the calculation to determine an institution’s ranking in their system. Mean yield rates by institutional characteristics are also listed in Table 7.

² US Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. (2000, August). *College Quality and the Earnings of Recent College Graduates*, NCES 2000-043. Washington, DC.
³ U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *Condition of Education, 2002*. (Indicator 16). Washington, DC.
⁴ The 2004 NACAC Admission Trends survey generated a mean national selectivity rate for four-year colleges of sixty-eight percent, a figure that roughly approximates the national rate after taking the margin of error into account.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are 15.9 million students enrolled in degree-granting institutions of postsecondary education in the United States. Of that total, 9.7 million (60 percent) are enrolled in four-year institutions. Sixty-four percent of those 9.7 million students attend public four-year colleges and 36 percent attend private four-year colleges.

The popular perception of college in the U.S., fueled by media, guidebooks, policymakers, and colleges themselves, is that of highly selective institutions similar to the Ivy League. However, a closer look at selectivity data shows that the four-year college landscape is much broader and more accessible than the popular vision. As a national average, four-year colleges accept 71 percent of the students who apply for admission (U.S. Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2002).

Table 7. Mean selectivity and yield rates by institutional characteristics, 2002.

| | Institutional selectivity rate | Institutional yield rate |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Total | 71.30% | 50.04% |
| Control | | |
| Public | 71.84 | 51.65 |
| Private | 71.03 | 49.16 |
| Enrollment | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 72.40 | 51.79 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 72.25 | 48.70 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 69.24 | 48.12 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 67.19 | 45.85 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 70.33 | 44.10 |
| 20,000 or more | 66.87 | 45.40 |
| Selectivity | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 34.98 | 60.50 |
| 50-70 percent | 62.51 | 49.01 |
| 71-85 percent | 78.27 | 44.44 |
| More than 85 percent | 92.60 | 55.90 |
| Yield | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 70.55 | 25.87 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 71.37 | 37.53 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 75.28 | 52.16 |
| More than 60 percent | 68.56 | 82.95 |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *IPEDS Peer Analysis System: includes four-year, non-profit, Title IV eligible colleges only, 2002.

Table 8. National share of applications for admission to four-year institutions by institutional selectivity, 2002.

| Selectivity | National Share of Applications |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Fewer than 50 percent of applicants accepted | 25.3 % |
| 51-70 percent of applicants accepted | 31.0 % |
| 71-85 percent of applicants accepted | 33.9 % |
| More than 85 percent of applicants accepted | 9.8 % |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *IPEDS Peer Analysis System: includes four-year, non-profit, Title IV eligible colleges only, 2002.

Where Do Students Apply?

According to data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the most highly selective institutions in the U.S.—those that offer admission to fewer than 50 percent of applicants—received around one fourth of the total four-year college application volume in 2002, the most recent data available. (See Table 8)

As detailed in other sections of this report, the most highly-selective institutions are most likely to engage in practices such as offering Early Decision policies, maintaining wait lists, and considering factors beyond a student’s grades, test scores, and strength of curriculum, such as a student’s essay, teacher/counselor recommendations, race/ethnicity, and subject test scores.

Is the application burden greater on one or more groups of institutions according to selectivity? Table 9 suggests that the most highly selective institutions receive more applications (on average) than less selective institutions.

These numbers reflect the reality that a small number of highly selective colleges are faced with managing application volume that is as much as three and a half times greater than other colleges. As a result, policies such as Early Decision (and its variant, Single Choice Early Action/Non-Binding Early Decision), wait lists, and consideration of a student’s demonstrated interest evolve in part to streamline or refine the admission process at those institutions. However, as Table 8 shows, these policies affect only one-fourth to one-third, depending on the policy, of all applications submitted to four-year colleges.

Where Do Students Go to College?

The vast majority of first-year students who enroll in four-year institutions attend institutions that accept more than half of all applicants for admission (See Table 10) A significant majority (59 percent) attend institutions that accept more than seven out of 10 applicants.

Table 9. Average number of applications for admission to four-year institutions by institutional selectivity, 2002.

| Selectivity | Number of Institutions | Total Number of Applications | Average Number of Applications Per Institution |
|--|------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Fewer than 50 percent of applicants accepted | 195 | 1,078,215 | 5,529 |
| 51-70 percent of applicants accepted | 358 | 1,319,858 | 3,687 |
| 71-85 percent of applicants accepted | 556 | 1,446,885 | 2,602 |
| More than 85 percent of applicants accepted | 293 | 417,563 | 1,425 |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *IPEDS Peer Analysis System: includes four-year, non-profit, Title IV eligible colleges only, 2002.

Table 10. National share of first-year students enrolled in four-year institutions by institutional selectivity, 2002.

| Selectivity | National Share of First-Year Students Enrolled |
|--|--|
| Fewer than 50 percent of applicants accepted | 13 % |
| 51-70 percent of applicants accepted | 29 % |
| 71-85 percent of applicants accepted | 42 % |
| More than 85 percent of applicants accepted | 17 % |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *IPEDS Peer Analysis System: includes four-year, non-profit, Title IV eligible colleges only, 2002.

Table 11. Media used by students inquiring about application to colleges and universities, 2004.

| | Mean percent of inquiries | Standard error |
|--------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Telephone | 19% | .766 |
| Email/the Internet | 36 | .904 |
| Written sources | 25 | .811 |
| College fairs | 24 | .850 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

The Admission “Interface”

While the college admission process remains a “brick and mortar” process—students still must explore tangible facets of a college to make an informed choice, while colleges continue to review applications one-by-one—it has become increasingly accessible to students absent the bricks and mortar. Technology is thoroughly infused into every aspect of the college admission process.

Online Applications

In 2004, colleges and universities nationwide received an average of 57 percent of their applications online—a significant increase from 35 percent in 2003. Ninety-three percent of colleges reported that online applications had increased from 2004, four percent reported that online applications remained about the same, and only three percent reported that online applications had decreased from 2003. While there were few variations among different groups of colleges, the following results are noteworthy:

- One hundred percent of colleges with at least 15,000 enrolled students or more reported an increase in the number of online applications from 2004.
- Institutions with high yield rates, were less likely to report an increase in online applications (74 percent) than institutions with low yield rates (92 percent).

How Students Approach Colleges

Students use all media at their disposal to contact colleges about the application process. As Table 11 shows, student inquiries were divided roughly evenly in 2004 between four different media.

College Admission Web Sites

While the Internet is no substitute for face-to-face interaction with college admission officers or a campus visit, a college’s Web site is a valuable first contact interface between student and institution. As Table 12 shows, colleges provide a wide range of information on their Web site to help inform prospective students.

Some features of note that were listed by colleges under the “other” category included information about financial aid and scholarships, virtual campus tours, campus housing information and forms, student testimonials and message boards, personalized portals, campus bookstores, athletics, and transfer information.

Table 12. Admission features of college Web sites, 2004.

| | Percent of colleges including feature on Web site |
|--|---|
| Online applications | 97.5% |
| Information about campus tours | 95.6 |
| College cost information | 95.1 |
| Detailed admission information, such as requirements, deadlines, and admission options | 94.7 |
| Online course catalog | 94.1 |
| Online forms for requesting application via mail | 91.3 |
| Online course registration | 58.6 |
| School profile/freshman class academic qualifications | 56.9 |
| Information for parents | 55.0 |
| Information for counselors | 37.2 |
| Email newsletters | 30.4 |
| Online admission chat room | 26.2 |
| Other | 14.8 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

How Colleges Notify Students of the Admission Decision

Overall, students can still expect a letter in the mail notifying them of their college admission status. However, a substantial number of colleges have explored more high-tech ways of letting their students know whether they are accepted or denied.

Respondents selecting the “other” category nearly unanimously mentioned that notification is also conducted by way of a personal telephone call to applicants (eight percent of all respondents).

Cost to Apply

The application fee is often the first financial hurdle prospective students encounter in their path to college. While the cost of applying to college on the whole is not exorbitant—92 percent of colleges charge \$1–50 to apply for admission (See Table 14)—it constitutes an out-of-pocket expense that can have an impact on where a student decides to submit an application.⁵

The average fee for applying to postsecondary education institutions nationwide is \$31.42. Private institutions, four-year colleges, colleges with large enrollments, highly selective colleges, and those with low yield rates have higher than average application fees. (See Table 15) The same colleges are also the most likely to waive the application fee for financial need.

Table 13. How institutions notify students of admission decision, 2004.

| | Percent of Colleges |
|---|---------------------|
| Notify student of decision in writing | 74.7% |
| Notify student of decision by email | 7.4 |
| Allow student to check for decision via Internet on university Web site | 13.1 |
| Other | 7.7 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

⁵ NACAC recommends that institutions of higher education consider waiving application fees for low-income students. The fee waiver guidelines are available on the NACAC Web site at www.nacac.com/downloads/form_feewaiver.pdf

Table 14. Percent of colleges reporting amount of admission application fee, 2002-2004.

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|--------------------|------|------|------|
| No application fee | 8 | 7 | 8% |
| \$1-25 | 33 | 34 | 30 |
| \$26-50 | 54 | 53 | 54 |
| More than \$50 | 5 | 6 | 8 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2002-2004.

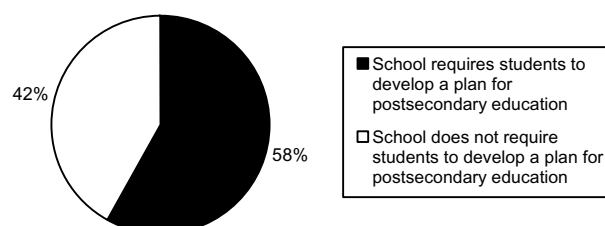
Table 15. Mean application fee and fee waiver allowance at colleges and universities, 2004.

| | Mean Application Fee Amount | Percent of Institutions Allowing Fee Waiver for Financial Need |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| All respondents | \$31.42 | 78.3% |
| Control | | |
| Public institutions | 27.33 | 69.8 |
| Private institutions | 34.56 | 84.6 |
| Institution Type | | |
| 2-Year | 26.14 | 58.3 |
| 4-Year | 33.06 | 83.9 |
| Enrollment | | |
| Fewer than 3,000 students | 31.18 | 79.3 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 29.97 | 77.4 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 31.85 | 77.1 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 32.65 | 73.2 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 32.57 | 73.5 |
| 20,000 or more | 38.19 | 80.0 |
| Selectivity | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 44.57 | 88.3 |
| 50-70 percent | 33.60 | 84.5 |
| 71-85 percent | 31.10 | 89.8 |
| More than 85 percent | 27.86 | 69.9 |
| Yield | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 36.64 | 94.8 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 34.12 | 90.6 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 30.83 | 80.5 |
| More than 60 percent | 28.36 | 59.3 |

Source: College Board annual survey (Common Data Set) 2003-2004.

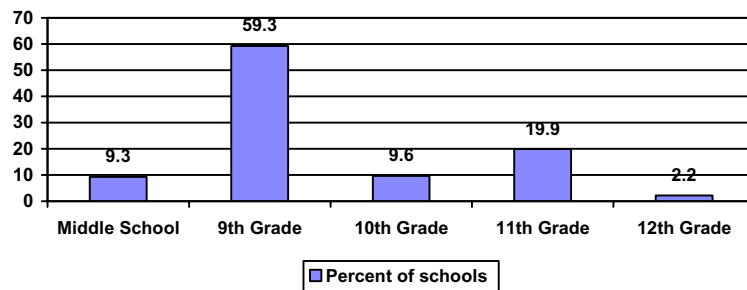
How Students Prepare for Application to College

Some research indicates that the development of an individualized educational plan during high school can increase the chances for postsecondary access and success.⁶ NACAC's Counseling Trends Survey asked school counselors whether students in their schools must prepare a written plan for postsecondary education. As Figure 11 shows, 58 percent of high schools nationwide require students to develop a formal, written plan for education beyond high school.

Figure 11. Percent of schools requiring students to develop a written plan for postsecondary education, 2004.

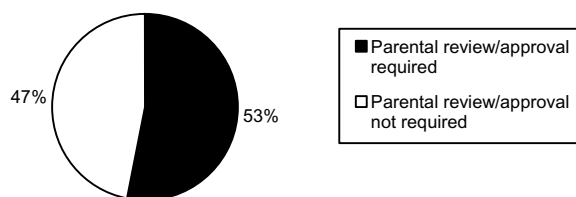
Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

⁶ Alliance for Excellent in Education. (2002). *Every Child a Graduate: A Framework for an Excellent Education for all Middle School and High School Students*. Washington, DC. Scott Jofus.

Figure 12. Starting grade for development of postsecondary plan, 2004.

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

As one might expect, of the schools that do require a written plan, more than half ask students to begin to develop their plan in the ninth grade. Twenty-two percent of schools did not require their students to develop a postsecondary plan until the 11th grade or after. This late start is a private school phenomenon, as 82 percent of schools that require initiation of a postsecondary plan in ninth grade are public.

Figure 13. Of schools requiring plans, percent of schools requiring parental review of student education plan, 2004.

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

Research also indicates that parental involvement is crucial in any effort to improve achievement and increase access to postsecondary education within the school.⁷ However, only half (53 percent) of schools that require a written postsecondary plan require parents to review and acknowledge their children's postsecondary plan. Overall, this means only about one-third of high schools require students to draft a postsecondary education plan that their parents are required to review. (See Figure 13)

Requiring students to develop written postsecondary plans appears to be a policy more frequently developed in schools with the largest number of students and where counselors are likely to have the highest student caseloads, although differences between schools based on individual characteristics were not pronounced. (See Table 16)

However, it is interesting to note that public schools, schools with larger enrollments, schools with higher student-to-counselor ratios, and schools with a high percentage of students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch were slightly less likely to require parental review or approval of the student's plan. This finding most likely reflects the well-documented difficulties that large, under-served public schools have engaging parents and families.⁸

⁷ For an authoritative overview of current research on family involvement in education, see Pathways to College Network. (2004) *Parental and Family Involvement Literature Review and Bibliography: An Exploratory Report*. Boston, MA.

⁸ For more information on how counselors can engage parents in the college admission process, see National Association for College Admission Counseling. (1999). "Parents and Counselors Together." Alexandria, VA., (PACT) guide, available for free online at www.nacac.com/pubs_counselors.html#pact.

Table 16. Percent of schools that require students to develop a plan for postsecondary education and percent of schools that require parental review/approval, 2004.

| | Students are Required to Develop a Plan for Postsecondary Education | Of Schools Requiring a Plan, Percent Parental Review/Approval of the Plan is Required |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| All schools | 58.2 | 52.8% |
| Control | | |
| Public | 64.3 | 51.5 |
| Private | 47.1 | 52.9 |
| <i>Private Non-Parochial</i> | 45.3 | 59.2 |
| <i>Private Parochial</i> | 50.4 | 53.7 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | |
| 0 to 25% | 63.9 | 51.0 |
| 26 to 50% | 67.3 | 61.8 |
| 51 to 100% | 60.5 | 40.5 |
| Enrollment | | |
| Less than 500 students | 55.0 | 59.5 |
| 500 to 999 students | 58.0 | 53.0 |
| 1,000 to 1,499 students | 56.9 | 45.8 |
| 1,500 to 1,999 students | 59.3 | 46.7 |
| More than 2,000 students | 68.5 | 50.8 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 52.4 | 60.0 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 56.0 | 53.7 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 58.2 | 56.0 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 57.8 | 46.8 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 60.5 | 47.8 |
| More than 500:1 | 60.2 | 58.1 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

Campus Visits

In 2004, 74 percent of colleges and universities hosted more prospective students as part of campus visits than they had in the previous year. (See Table 17)

Forty-seven percent of colleges consider a campus visit by a prospective student as a “plus factor” in the admission process (see Chapter 4, “Factors in the Admission Process: ‘Demonstrated Interest,’” for more information).

Colleges that were more likely than average to report an increase in campus visits included:

- colleges with more than 20,000 students (89 percent)
- colleges in the Southwest region (83 percent)
- the most selective institutions (86 percent).

Colleges less likely than average to report an increase in campus visits included:

- two-year colleges (56 percent)
- colleges in the Midwest region (68 percent)
- the least selective colleges (64 percent).

Gender Trends in College Applications

As mentioned in Chapter 1, females now outnumber males by just over one million on our nation’s campuses. This trend is likely to persist in the near future, as for the past two years, 66 percent of colleges and universities have reported receiving more applications from females than from males. Table 18 below displays gender application patterns in 2004 among different groups of institutions.

Table 17. Change in campus visits from previous year as reported by colleges and universities, 2004.

| | 2004 |
|-----------------|------|
| Increased | 74% |
| Stayed the same | 17 |
| Decreased | 9 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

International Applications

For the first time in the three years that NACAC has measured information on applications from international students, a larger number of colleges reported a decrease in international applications than reported an increase. (See Table 19) This mirrors international student enrollment trends reported by the Institute of International Education (IIE).

Noteworthy differences among colleges in 2004, international applications:

- Colleges less likely than average to report increased applications from international students include public institutions (21 percent) and colleges in the western United States (29 percent) and Middle States (27 percent)
- Colleges more likely than average to report an increase in applications from international students include schools in the Southwest (50 percent), and the most highly selective colleges (40 percent).

According to IIE, the number of international students studying in the U.S. during 2003–04 decreased by two percent from the previous year. IIE's Open Doors report noted the following country-specific trends:

Enrollment patterns continued to vary by countries of origin. India remains the largest sending country origin for the third year, and its numbers climbed by seven percent over the prior year, to a total of 79,736 in 2003/04, offsetting decreases from a number of other countries which experienced sharp declines. However, India's rate of increase in 2003/04 has slowed from the prior year's dramatic 12 percent growth. Among the leading five places of origin, total enrollments fell by five percent for students from China (still the second largest

sending country with 61,765) and fell by 11 percent for Japan (fourth with 40,835). Numbers of students rose by approximately two percent from Republic of Korea (third with 52,484) and Canada (fifth with 27,017). With a decrease of seven percent in students studying in U.S. institutions, Taiwan dropped to 6th place (with 26,178), moving Canada up to become the only non-Asian country among the top five. Additional sharp decreases in Asian student enrollments were reported from Thailand (down 10.5 percent to 8,937), Indonesia (down 15 percent to 8,880), Hong Kong (down nine percent to 7,353) and Pakistan (down 10 percent to 7,325).

Despite decreases from many Asian places of origin and an overall decline of three percent, Asia remains the largest sending region by a wide margin—almost 57 percent of international students studying in the U.S. still come from Asia...Students from the Middle East continued to decrease substantially, although this 9 percent rate of decrease in 2003/04 is slightly less than the 10 percent decline for 2002/03. While major decreases have been reported in the numbers of students from many Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia (down 16 percent to 3,521), Kuwait (down 17 percent to 1,846), Jordan (down 15 percent to 1,853), Cyprus (down 15 percent to 1,562), and the United Arab Emirates (down 30 percent to 1,248), students from the Middle East continue to account for approximately six percent of all international students enrolled in U.S. higher education.⁹

⁹ Institute for International Education (2004). "Press Release: Open Doors 2004: International Students in the U.S." New York, NY.

Table 18. Gender trends in applications, 2004.

| | More applications from males than females | More applications from females than males | About the same number of applications from both | Not applicable (gender exclusive) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 14.9 | 65.7 | 16.2 | 3.2% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 17.9 | 59.0 | 23.1 | 0 |
| Private | 13.5 | 69.3 | 12.4 | 4.8 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 17.5 | 50.0 | 32.5 | 0 |
| Four-year | 14.7 | 67.3 | 14.5 | 3.5 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 14.5 | 65.4 | 14.9 | 5.2 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 11.3 | 73.6 | 15.1 | 0 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 7.7 | 67.3 | 25.0 | 0 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 22.2 | 44.4 | 33.3 | 0 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 22.2 | 66.7 | 11.1 | 0 |
| 20,000 or more | 27.3 | 45.5 | 27.3 | 0 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 14.5 | 59.5 | 21.7 | 4.3 |
| Middle States | 12.7 | 73.6 | 10.0 | 3.6 |
| South | 18.0 | 65.0 | 11.0 | 6.0 |
| Midwest | 13.5 | 67.3 | 17.3 | 1.9 |
| Southwest | 15.0 | 70.0 | 15.0 | 0 |
| West | 18.3 | 59.2 | 21.1 | 1.4 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 24.0 | 58.7 | 17.3 | 0 |
| 50-70 percent | 13.0 | 67.1 | 15.1 | 4.8 |
| 71-85 percent | 12.4 | 65.8 | 17.4 | 4.3 |
| More than 85 percent | 14.3 | 63.3 | 22.4 | 0 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 13.0 | 65.7 | 20.4 | .9 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 11.7 | 72.1 | 11.7 | 4.6 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 18.1 | 59.0 | 18.1 | 4.8 |
| More than 60 percent | 26.0 | 48.0 | 26.0 | 0 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 19. College estimates of change in applications from international students 2004.

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|
| Increased | 36 | 44 | 31% |
| Stayed the same | 34 | 33 | 34 |
| Decreased | 30 | 23 | 35 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2002-2004.

Chapter 3. Admission Strategies

CONTENTS



- Early Decision, Early Action and Wait Lists Summary
- Early Decision in Depth
- Early Action in Depth
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Early Decision, Early Action and Wait Lists Summary

Three trends generally describe the state of admission strategies in 2004. First, more colleges reported a decline in Early Decision applications than reported an increase, a marked reversal from just two years ago. Second, the rate of growth of Early Action applications appears to be slowing, as a smaller percentage of colleges reported an increase in those applications. Finally, while the number of colleges maintaining wait lists have not increased significantly over the years, the number of students placed on wait lists continues to rise.

Definitions of Early Decision and Early Action

Early Decision (ED) is the application process in which students make a commitment to a first-choice institution where, if admitted, they definitely will enroll. Early Action (EA) is the application process in which students make application to an institution of preference and receive a decision well in advance of the institution's regular response rate.¹ In addition,

NACAC approved a third early application offering—single choice Early Action—in 2004. Single choice Early Action (SCEA), also referred to as non-binding Early Decision, can best be described as a mid-point between Early Decision and Early Action. Similar to ED, if a student applies to an SCEA college, the student is prohibited from applying either ED or EA to other colleges, but may apply regular admission anywhere else. Unlike ED and similar to EA, students are not bound to attend the SCEA college if they are accepted.²

Summary of Findings

According to the NACAC 2004 Early Decision and Early Action Summary Report 10 percent of four-year colleges and universities offer the Early Decision admission option to students. According to the NACAC 2004 Early Decision and Early Action Summary Report, there are 378 colleges and universities that offer Early Decision or Early Action admission (16 percent of all four-year colleges).³

As Table 20 indicates, those most likely to offer early decision include highly selective colleges (46 percent), colleges with low yield rates (33 percent), colleges in the New England (29 percent) and Middle States regions (28 percent), and private colleges (23 percent).

¹ NACAC's complete statement on the "Definitions of Admission Decision Options" including early decision and early action, is available online at: www.nacac.com/downloads/policy_admission_options.pdf
² NACAC's Admission Practices Committee will further define the single choice Early Action option and its implications in 2005.
³ National Association for College Admission Counseling. (2004). *NACAC 2004 Early Decision/Early Action Guide*. Alexandria, VA.

Table 20. Percent of institutions with early decision, early action and wait lists by institutional characteristics, 2004.

| | Percent of postsecondary institutions that offer early decision | Percent of postsecondary institutions that offer early action | Percent of postsecondary institutions that maintain a wait list |
|--|--|--|--|
| Total | 16.8 | 24.1 | 33.5% |
| Control | | | |
| Public | 4.8 | 15.8 | 30.2 |
| Private | 22.8 | 28.1 | 35.4 |
| Type | | | |
| Two-year | 5.4 | 3.1 | 21.6 |
| Four-year | 17.7 | 25.6 | 34.6 |
| Enrollment | | | |
| Fewer than 3,000 students | 19.8 | 23.4 | 29.1 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 12.5 | 29.8 | 38.8 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 13.5 | 21.3 | 38.5 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 11.1 | 44.4 | 44.4 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 0 | 14.3 | 44.4 |
| 20,000 or more | 0 | 10.0 | 45.5 |
| Region | | | |
| New England | 29.2 | 33.3 | 45.6 |
| Middle States | 27.9 | 27.3 | 41.7 |
| South | 17.0 | 30.1 | 27.7 |
| Midwest | 7.7 | 14.0 | 25.2 |
| Southwest | 10.5 | 23.5 | 31.6 |
| West | 10.8 | 24.2 | 36.9 |
| Selectivity | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 45.7 | 20.9 | 70.4 |
| 50-70 percent | 18.3 | 30.2 | 43.1 |
| 71-85 percent | 9.6 | 24.8 | 15.4 |
| More than 85 percent | 2.1 | 10.9 | 8.3 |
| Yield | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 33.3 | 41.8 | 54.8 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 15.7 | 20.9 | 25.4 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 6.0 | 15.1 | 25.3 |
| More than 60 percent | 10.6 | 17.1 | 26.1 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

According to the 2004 NACAC Early Decision and Early Action Summary Report, eight percent of colleges offer the early action admission option to students. Institutions from the NACAC survey sample most likely to offer early action include institutions with low yield rates (42 percent), schools with enrollments of 10,000 to 14,999 (44 percent) and institutions in the South (30 percent) and New England regions (33 percent).

Note: Data in Table 20 suggest that the Admission Trends Survey is over-representative of those colleges and universities that offer Early Decision and Early Action. However, data in Table 20 are reflective of differences between groups of institutions.

Finally, 34 percent of colleges maintain wait lists. Those most likely to have a wait list include the most highly selective colleges (70 percent), colleges with the lowest yield rates (55 percent), and colleges with large enrollments of over 20,000 students (46 percent).

Early Decision

For the first time in five years, the number of colleges reporting a decrease in Early Decision applications exceeded the number of colleges reporting an increase in ED applications. While 37 percent of colleges continue to report an increased number of Early Decision applications, nearly one-half (45 percent) indicate a decline in Early Decision applications.

Were some colleges more likely to experience decreases in Early Decision applications than others? As shown in Table 22, highly selective colleges (66.7 percent) are still reporting Early Decision applications at a rate much higher than average. Meanwhile, public colleges (58.3 percent) and colleges with lower selectivity rates (54.5 percent) were more likely to experience decreases in Early Decision applications.⁴

Does it follow that a smaller percentage of the overall applicant pool is accepted through Early Decision? Overall, nearly half of all Early Decision colleges (49 percent) accepted fewer students through Early Decision in 2003 than in 2002. As Table 23 indicates, the number of colleges reporting a decrease in the number of students admitted through ED has nearly tripled in the last three years.

At colleges with Early Decision admission policies, nearly eight percent of all applications were received early. From the NACAC Admission Trends survey sample, Early Decision colleges reported a nearly identical selectivity rate for Early Decision admission and regular admission. In keeping with the binding nature of Early Decision programs, the yield rate for Early Decision applications was substantially higher than the yield rate for the overall applicant pool at early decision schools.

Table 21. College estimates of early decision application change, 1999-2003.

| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Increased | 58 | 58 | 53 | 43 | 37% |
| Stayed the same | 27 | 29 | 28 | 33 | 18 |
| Decreased | 15 | 13 | 17 | 24 | 45 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2000-2004.

⁴ NACAC's Admission Practices Committee will further define the single choice Early Action option and its implications in 2005.

Table 22. Percent of institutions reporting a change from previous year in Early Decision applications, 2003.

| | Increased | Decreased | Stayed the Same |
|--|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Total | 37.3 | 45.1 | 17.6% |
| Control | | | |
| Public | 25.0 | 58.3 | 16.7 |
| Private | 39.8 | 42.4 | 17.8 |
| Type | | | |
| Two-year | 33.3 | 50.0 | 16.7 |
| Four-year | 37.5 | 44.9 | 17.6 |
| Enrollment | | | |
| Fewer than 3,000 students | 37.0 | 40.7 | 22.2 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 70.0 | 20.0 | 10.0 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 38.5 | 46.2 | 15.4 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 0 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 0 | 100 | 0 |
| 20,000 or more | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Region | | | |
| New England | 34.6 | 30.8 | 34.6 |
| Middle States | 48.7 | 38.5 | 12.8 |
| South | 36.0 | 44.0 | 20.0 |
| Midwest | 26.5 | 64.7 | 8.8 |
| Southwest | 33.3 | 66.7 | 0 |
| West | 40.0 | 40.0 | 20.0 |
| Selectivity | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 66.7 | 19.4 | 13.9 |
| 50-70 percent | 34.2 | 47.4 | 18.4 |
| 71-85 percent | 27.0 | 48.6 | 24.3 |
| More than 85 percent | 0 | 71.4 | 28.6 |
| Yield | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 47.2 | 37.7 | 15.1 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 30.4 | 45.7 | 23.9 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 33.3 | 50.0 | 16.7 |
| More than 60 percent | 36.4 | 54.5 | 9.1 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004

Table 23. Change in the number of students admitted through early decision, 2001-2003.

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|
| Increased | 42 | 30 | 29% |
| Stayed the same | 41 | 44 | 22 |
| Decreased | 18 | 26 | 49 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys. 2002-2004.

Table 24. Key statistics for Early Decision colleges, 2003.

| | Mean | Standard Error |
|--|------|----------------|
| Mean percentage of all applications received at ED colleges through early decision | 7.6% | .01 |
| Mean percentage of early decision applications accepted (ED selectivity rate) | 68.7 | .02 |
| Mean overall selectivity rate for institutions with early decision | 56.7 | .02 |
| Mean percentage of admitted ED students enrolled (ED yield rate) | 90.5 | .01 |
| Mean overall yield rate at ED colleges | 35.4 | .01 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Early Action

While the majority of colleges with Early Action policies continued to report application increases, the rate of increase has dropped considerably in the past three years. (See Table 25) A majority (56 percent) of Early Action colleges continue to report increases in the number of Early Action applications. However, the number of colleges reporting a decrease in Early Action applications more than tripled between 2002 and 2003.

Were some institutions more likely to experience decreases in Early Action applications than others? Institutions in the middle selectivity range (those that accept 50–85 percent of applicants) were more likely to receive increases in EA applications, while the least selective colleges and colleges with the lowest yield rates were most likely to experience a decrease.⁵

Similar to Early Decision, substantially more colleges reported that the number of students admitted through Early Action had decreased from the previous year. In fact, as Table 27 indicates, the number of colleges reporting fewer Early Action applications has quadrupled over the past three years.

At colleges with Early Action admission policies, nearly 34 percent of all applications were received during the Early Action period. From the NACAC Admission Trends Survey sample, the selectivity rate for Early Action admission at EA colleges was the same as the selectivity rate under regular admission. Early Action produced a nearly identical yield rate to the overall applicant pool at Early Action schools.

Table 25. College estimates of Early Action application change, 1999-2003.

| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Increased | 73 | 65 | 72 | 68 | 56% |
| Stayed the same | 19 | 27 | 21 | 22 | 7 |
| Decreased | 8 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 37 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2000-2004.

⁵ Table 26 includes some data groupings—such as colleges with 20,000 or more students enrolled—with too few data to make conclusions about whether EA applications at these colleges nationwide actually increased at a rate higher than average.

Table 26. Percent of institutions reporting a change in Early Action applications received, 2003.

| | Increased | Decreased | Stayed the Same |
|--|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Total | 56.0 | 36.9 | 7.1% |
| Control | | | |
| Public | 50.0 | 41.2 | 8.8 |
| Private | 57.9 | 35.5 | 6.5 |
| Type | | | |
| Two-year | 20.0 | 60.0 | 20.0 |
| Four-year | 57.4 | 36.0 | 6.6 |
| Enrollment | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 55.1 | 37.7 | 7.2 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 71.4 | 7.1 | 21.4 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 64.3 | 35.7 | 0 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 0 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 0 |
| 20,000 or more | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Region | | | |
| New England | 63.6 | 27.3 | 9.1 |
| Middle States | 63.9 | 36.1 | 0 |
| South | 64.3 | 28.6 | 7.1 |
| Midwest | 36.1 | 52.8 | 11.1 |
| Southwest | 75.0 | 25.0 | 0 |
| West | 53.3 | 33.3 | 13.3 |
| Selectivity | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 50.0 | 44.4 | 5.6 |
| 50-70 percent | 64.4 | 26.7 | 8.9 |
| 71-85 percent | 65.0 | 32.5 | 2.5 |
| More than 85 percent | 20.0 | 60.0 | 20.0 |
| Yield | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 67.4 | 25.6 | 7.0 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 54.0 | 40.0 | 6.0 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 41.2 | 41.2 | 17.6 |
| More than 60 percent | 44.4 | 55.6 | 0 |

Source: Admission Trend Survey, 2004.

Table 27. Change in the number of students admitted through Early Action, 2001-2003.

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|
| Increased | 53 | 53 | 48% |
| Stayed the same | 35 | 36 | 15 |
| Decreased | 9 | 11 | 37 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2002-2004.

Table 28. Key statistics for Early Action colleges, 2003.

| | Mean | Standard Error |
|--|-------|----------------|
| Mean percentage of all applications received at EA colleges through early action | 33.6% | .03 |
| Mean percentage of early action applications accepted (EA selectivity rate) | 67.6 | .02 |
| Mean overall selectivity rate for institutions with early action | 65.2 | .02 |
| Mean percentage of admitted EA students enrolled (EA yield rate) | 41.4 | .02 |
| Mean overall yield rate at EA colleges | 36.7 | .01 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Wait Lists

Use of Wait Lists

As noted in Table 29, 34 percent of colleges and universities maintain a wait list. On average, around 10 percent of all students who apply to these institutions are placed on the wait list.⁶ As Table 29 shows, the number of colleges using wait lists has remained relatively constant over the past eight years.

Table 29. Percent of colleges using wait lists, 1996-2004.

| | Use Wait List | Do Not Use Wait List |
|------|---------------|----------------------|
| 1996 | 36 | 64% |
| 1997 | 34 | 66 |
| 1998 | 29 | 71 |
| 1999 | 36 | 64 |
| 2000 | 34 | 66 |
| 2001 | 32 | 68 |
| 2002 | 32 | 68 |
| 2003 | 36 | 64 |
| 2004 | 34 | 66 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 1996-2004.

Institutions that are more likely to use wait lists are those with highly selective admission and those that have a difficult time attracting students to the institution (those with low yield rates). Both types of institution utilize the wait list to ensure that highly qualified applicants are not turned down. Each also use the lists as a way of reserving spots for those who are most interested in attending, while hedging their bets by keeping other qualified students on the list if needed to fill slots later in the process.

While the number of colleges using wait lists has remained the same, the number of students placed on wait lists continues to rise, as Table 30 shows.

In 2003, the most striking trend among institutions with wait lists is that institutions in the middle-selectivity range (accepting between 50 and 85 percent of students) were significantly more likely to report an increase in the number of students wait listed than the most highly selective institutions and the least selective institutions. Only 28 percent of the most selective institutions reported an increase in wait-listed students, compared to 58 percent for institutions accepting between 50–70 percent of applicants and 70 percent for institutions accepting 70–85 percent of applicants.

⁶ Standard error for mean percentage of students placed on wait lists is .006.

Table 30. Change in number of students placed on wait list from previous year, 1999-2003.

| | Increase | Same | Decrease |
|------|----------|------|----------|
| 1999 | 47 | 31 | 22% |
| 2000 | 47 | 30 | 23 |
| 2001 | 42 | 35 | 23 |
| 2002 | 50 | 33 | 17 |
| 2003 | 52 | 34 | 14 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 1999-2003.

Chances for Success

In 2004, 57 percent of all wait-listed students opted to remain on the wait list. An average of 27 percent of all students who were placed on the wait list ultimately gained admission to the college or university that wait listed them.⁷

As Table 31 indicates, students' chances of admission off of a wait list were lowest at the most selective institutions. Wait-listed students were slightly more likely to be accepted at large institutions and public institutions, while their chances were lower at small, private colleges.

⁷ Standard error for mean percentage of students accepted from wait list is .02.

Table 31. Mean percentage of students accepted off the wait list, 2003.

| | Mean Percent Accepted |
|--|-----------------------|
| Total | 27.3% |
| Control | |
| Public | 35.5 |
| Private | 24.6 |
| Type | |
| Two-year | 54.5 |
| Four-year | 25.6 |
| Enrollment | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 25.7 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 35.3 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 31.9 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 28.6 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 26.8 |
| 20,000 or more | 36.6 |
| Region | |
| New England | 22.0 |
| Middle States | 25.3 |
| South | 25.0 |
| Midwest | 38.2 |
| Southwest | 44.7 |
| West | 20.3 |
| Selectivity | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 18.3 |
| 50-70 percent | 29.8 |
| 71-85 percent | 39.6 |
| More than 85 percent | 46.6 |
| Yield | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 30.1 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 19.3 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 30.8 |
| More than 60 percent | 42.5 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trend Survey, 2004.

Chapter 4. Factors in the Admission Process

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 - o Demonstrated Interest
 - o The Essay/Writing Sample

Factors in the Admission Decision: 2004 Summary

- Top factors: Grades in college preparatory courses, admission test scores (such as ACT or SAT), and overall grades remain the top factors in the college admission decision for all colleges and universities.
- Key “tip” factors: “Tip” factors are best described as factors that, grades and test scores being similar, could influence the admission decision one way or the other. The application essay has nearly overtaken a student’s rank in class as the uppermost “tip” factor in the admission process. Recommendations from counselors and teachers continue to be an important part of the application review process as well.
- Factors first measured in 2003 and 2004: A student’s demonstrated interest in attending the institution continued to be a “tip” factor in admission. In addition, 65 percent of colleges attribute some level of importance to a student’s alumni relations.
- Essay as a factor in admission has continued to grow in importance over the last 11 years. In 1993, only 14 percent of colleges reported a student’s essay had considerable importance in college admission compared to 25 percent of colleges in 2004.

See Table 32 for a complete overview of college estimations of the relative importance of factors in the admission decision in 2004.

Table 32. Factors in the college admission decision: percent of all colleges attributing levels of importance, 2004.

| Factor | Considerable Importance | Moderate Importance | Limited Importance | No Importance |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Grades in College Prep Courses | 80.3 | 10.2 | 3.0 | 6.4% |
| Standardized Admission Tests | 60.3 | 27.5 | 5.4 | 6.8 |
| Grades in All Courses | 56.9 | 27.6 | 8.5 | 7.1 |
| Class Rank | 28.2 | 36.9 | 20.2 | 14.7 |
| Essay or writing sample | 25.2 | 35.4 | 20.3 | 19.1 |
| Counselor Recommendation | 18.4 | 43.5 | 25.7 | 12.3 |
| Teacher Recommendation | 18.1 | 40.9 | 28.4 | 12.5 |
| Interview | 8.7 | 28.9 | 32.6 | 29.8 |
| Work/Extracurricular Activities | 7.5 | 42.1 | 35.4 | 15.0 |
| Student's Demonstrated Interest | 6.9 | 15.8 | 30.1 | 47.3 |
| State Graduation Exam Scores | 6.4 | 9.8 | 24.0 | 57.4 |
| Subject Tests (SAT II, AP, IB) | 4.9 | 20.0 | 31.8 | 43.4 |
| Race/Ethnicity | 2.2 | 16.4 | 24.0 | 57.4 |
| Ability to Pay | 1.6 | 4.0 | 12.7 | 81.6 |
| State or County of Residence | 1.6 | 6.7 | 22.0 | 69.7 |
| Alumni Relations | 1.4 | 19.0 | 44.3 | 35.2 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Factors in Admission: 1993–2004

Over the past decade, the relative value of each factor in the admission decision has remained fairly consistent, with a couple of notable exceptions. Since 1993, grades in college prep courses (a proxy for strength of curriculum) have remained the number one factor in the decision about whom to admit to college. (See Table 33)

Just beyond a student's performance in rigorous academic coursework, colleges have placed an increasing emphasis on admission test scores and overall grade point averages. During the same time span, colleges have de-emphasized their assessment of a student's rank in class.

The application essay has also been slowly increasing as a factor in the admission process. Though not one of the top factors in the admission process, the essay has nonetheless gained ground as an evaluative tool that helps admission officers assess—among other things—the student's interest in attending an institution, their writing ability, and their plans for postsecondary education.

Table 33. Factors in admission, 1993-2004.
(percent of institutions reporting "considerable importance" assigned to factor)

| | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Grades/College Prep | 82 | 83 | 80 | 78 | 81 | 79 | 84 | 78 | 80 | 76 | 78 | 80% |
| Class Rank | 42 | 40 | 39 | 36 | 34 | 32 | 32 | 34 | 31 | 35 | 33 | 28 |
| Admission Tests | 46 | 43 | 47 | 48 | 50 | 51 | 54 | 58 | 52 | 57 | 61 | 60 |
| Grades/All Courses | 39 | 37 | 41 | 38 | 41 | 44 | 42 | 43 | 45 | 50 | 54 | 57 |
| Counselor Recomm. | 22 | 20 | 19 | 17 | 20 | 16 | 18 | 16 | 17 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| Teacher Recomm. | 21 | 19 | 18 | 19 | 19 | 16 | 14 | 14 | 16 | 14 | 18 | 18 |
| Essay | 14 | 17 | 21 | 20 | 18 | 19 | 19 | 20 | 20 | 19 | 23 | 25 |
| Interview | 12 | 12 | 15 | 13 | 11 | 11 | 9 | 11 | 11 | 10 | 9 | 9 |
| Work/Activities | 6 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 8 |
| Ability to Pay | NA | NA | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| State Exams | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | 6 | 7 | 6 |
| Subject Exams | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | 6 | 7 | 5 |
| Residence | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Race/Ethnicity | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | 3 | 2 |
| Demonstrated Interest | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | 7 | 7 |
| Alumni Relations | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | 1 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 1993-2004.

Factors in Admission by Institutional Characteristics: 2004

The following are highlights of differences among varying types of institutions. It is important to note that nearly all institutions attribute some level of importance to each of the factors discussed below. These observations are not to be construed as “hard and fast” rules, such as that “public schools don’t care about work or extra curricular activities.”

However, there is a benefit to knowing that the characteristics of each institution will determine, to some extent, the way each factor in the admission process is viewed. With few exceptions, colleges across the board view the top three factors—grades in college prep courses, admission test scores, and overall grade point average—as the top three factors in the admission process. For a complete comparison of institutions by individual characteristics, see Table 34.

Public and Private Institutions

Differences between public and private institutions reveal that in many ways, private college admission is more “holistic” than public school admission. In some instances, the volume of applications at public institutions demands a more mechanistic process. Indeed, admission officers at public institutions are responsible for reading more than twice the number of applications as their private school counterparts.¹ In some cases, public colleges are simply less selective than private colleges, and therefore have less need for extensive review of application files. As stated above, there are no significant differences between public and private colleges’ ratings of the top three factors in the admission process.

- Private colleges assign a higher value to the “tip” factors than do public colleges. Such factors include the essay/writing sample, the interview, the counselor recommendation, teacher recommendation, and work/extra-curricular activities.²

- Private colleges are more likely to assign a higher degree of importance to a student’s relation to alumni.³

- Public colleges are more likely to consider state or county of residence than private colleges.⁴

Institutional enrollment

Similar differences exist between small and large institutions as exist between public and private institutions. Larger institutions, with smaller staffs relative to the number of applications received and more mechanistic admission systems, are literally unable to give the depth of consideration to many factors as their smaller (and mostly, but not always private) counterparts.

- Smaller colleges are significantly more likely than larger colleges to consider an interview and counselor or teacher recommendations as important factors in the admission process. Smaller colleges are slightly more likely to consider a student’s essay and their demonstrated interest in attending the institution as important factors than larger colleges.⁵
- Smaller colleges are more likely than larger colleges to consider a student’s alumni relations, and slightly more likely to consider a student’s ability to pay as an important factor in the admission process.⁶

¹ National Association for College Admission Counseling (2004b). “The Admission Process: More Mechanical or More Holistic?” *NACAC Bulletin*. March/April 2004, p. 13.

² Correlations between private college status and attribution of importance in admission: essay/writing sample (.304), interview (.466), counselor recommendation (.431), teacher recommendation (.375), work/extra curricular activities (.305) $P < .0001$

³ Private correlation with alumni relations factor: (.317), $P < .0001$

⁴ Private correlation with state/county of residence: (-.212), $P < .0001$

⁵ Smaller institutional size correlated with: interview (.363), teacher recommendation (.230), counselor recommendation (.228), $P < .0001$; essay (.162), $P < .01$; demonstrated interest (.112), $P < .05$

⁶ Smaller institutional size correlated with: alumni relations (.194), $P < .0001$; ability to pay (.120), $P < .05$

- Larger colleges are more likely to place a larger emphasis on test scores and class rank than smaller colleges while smaller colleges are more likely to emphasize overall grades than larger colleges.⁷
- Larger colleges are slightly more likely to consider a student's race or ethnicity than smaller colleges.⁸

Institutions by Selectivity Level

The fewer students an institution accepts, the more likely it is to place emphasis on the “tip” factors in the admission process. Since grades and test scores for the top competitors for selective college admission are often similarly high, these colleges must dig deeper for information with which to evaluate each applicant.

- Institutions that accepted fewer applicants placed slightly higher emphasis on the “tip” factors that institutions that admitted most applicants, including (in descending order) the essay, teacher recommendation, work/extra-curricular activities, and the counselor recommendation.⁹
- The more selective institutions were likely to attribute a higher degree of importance to a student's race or ethnicity than less selective institutions. The same institutions also placed slightly more emphasis than less selective institutions on state or county of residence and alumni relations.¹⁰

- The more selective institutions also placed larger emphasis on subject tests, such as Advanced Placement tests, SAT II, and International Baccalaureate exams.¹¹

Institutional Yield Rate

Institutions are said to have a high yield rate if they enroll most of the students that they accept to their institutions. Institutions with low yield rates, on the other hand, enroll only a small percentage of the students they accept. It is difficult to generalize about institutions on the basis of yield rates, because some very different types of colleges have similar yield rates. For instance, highly selective schools, such as those in the Ivy League, share similar yield rates with large, open-enrollment public colleges, such as those that require a high school diploma and a C-average as the basis for admission. However, as this report shows, institutions of the latter type—open- or near-open enrollment institutions—logically place less emphasis on the “tip” factors in the admission process.

- Institutions with higher yield rates attributed less importance to grades in college prep courses than institutions with lower yield rates. The most likely cause of this finding is the behavior of high-yield, non-selective colleges, which accept almost all of the students who apply and enroll large numbers as a result.¹²
- Institutions with higher yield rates also attributed less importance to “tip” factors, such as the essay, counselor/teacher recommendations, and work/extra-curricular activities. Institutions with higher yield rates attributed less importance to both race/ethnicity and alumni relations of its applicants than institutions with lower yield rates.¹³

⁷ Larger institutional enrollment correlated with: test scores (.156) and class rank (.128), $P < .01$; smaller institutional enrollment correlated with overall GPA (.145), $P < .01$

⁸ Larger institutional enrollment correlated with race/ethnicity (.169), $P < .01$

⁹ More selectivity correlated with: essay (.244), teacher recommendation (.203), work/extra-curricular activities (.192), $P < .0001$; counselor recommendation (.121), $P < .01$

¹⁰ More selectivity correlated with: race/ethnicity (.266), $P < .0001$; state/county of residence (.140), $P < .01$; alumni relations (.101), $P < .05$

¹¹ More selectivity correlated with subject tests (.154), $P < .01$

¹² Indeed, regression analysis using colleges' estimations of the importance of “grades in college prep courses” as the dependent variable and control (public/private), enrollment, yield and selectivity provides a modest R^2 (.271), but significant correlation values between both selectivity and yield.

¹³ Lower yield rates correlated with: counselor recommendation (.205) and work/extra-curricular activities (.184), $P < .0001$; race/ethnicity (.134), alumni relations (.130), and teacher recommendations (.116), $P < .01$; and the essay (.107), $P < .05$.

Table 34. Factors in admission: percent of colleges attributing “considerable importance” to factors by institutional characteristics, 2004.

| | Grades in college prep courses | Admission test scores | Overall GPA/Grades in all courses | Class rank |
|---|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------|
| Total | 80.3 | 60.3 | 56.9 | 28.2% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 69.1 | 60.5 | 43.6 | 33.5 |
| Private | 85.8 | 60.0 | 63.2 | 25.8 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 16.2 | 23.7 | 16.2 | 2.7 |
| Four-year | 85.4 | 63.2 | 60.0 | 30.4 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 80.2 | 55.2 | 62.0 | 23.1 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 83.0 | 58.3 | 54.2 | 25.5 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 80.4 | 67.3 | 52.9 | 35.3 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 77.8 | 44.4 | 37.5 | 33.3 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 77.8 | 77.8 | 55.6 | 22.2 |
| 20,000 or more | 75.0 | 91.7 | 25.0 | 58.3 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 89.2 | 32.3 | 53.8 | 23.4 |
| Middle States | 83.2 | 56.0 | 66.0 | 23.2 |
| South | 85.9 | 78.3 | 53.8 | 26.9 |
| Midwest | 72.0 | 68.4 | 56.0 | 33.6 |
| Southwest | 72.2 | 66.7 | 35.3 | 66.7 |
| West | 80.6 | 46.3 | 56.1 | 20.0 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 80.9 | 61.2 | 61.2 | 39.7 |
| 50-70 percent | 87.3 | 59.4 | 48.2 | 26.2 |
| 71-85 percent | 84.3 | 59.5 | 65.8 | 23.0 |
| More than 85 percent | 49.0 | 51.0 | 42.9 | 22.4 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 96.1 | 55.9 | 62.0 | 29.4 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 83.7 | 59.8 | 56.6 | 24.6 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 69.5 | 66.7 | 52.4 | 29.3 |
| More than 60 percent | 52.2 | 54.3 | 47.8 | 26.7 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 34. Factors in admission: percent of colleges attributing “considerable importance” to factors by institutional characteristics, 2004. (continued)

| | Essay or writing sample | Counselor recommendation | Teacher recommendation | Work/Extra-curricular activities |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Total | 25.2 | 18.4 | 18.1 | 7.5% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 12.7 | 3.6 | 5.4 | 4.2 |
| Private | 31.7 | 25.8 | 24.4 | 9.2 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 13.5 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 0 |
| Four-year | 26.3 | 19.6 | 19.3 | 8.1 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 30.9 | 24.0 | 22.8 | 6.8 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 19.6 | 10.4 | 12.5 | 10.6 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 21.6 | 15.7 | 17.6 | 7.8 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 22.2 | 11.1 | 11.1 | 11.1 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 20,000 or more | 8.3 | 0 | 0 | 8.3 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 32.3 | 29.2 | 27.7 | 10.8 |
| Middle States | 24.2 | 22.0 | 18.0 | 8.9 |
| South | 22.0 | 16.3 | 17.4 | 8.7 |
| Midwest | 17.7 | 13.6 | 14.8 | 3.4 |
| Southwest | 38.9 | 22.2 | 16.7 | 11.1 |
| West | 37.3 | 13.4 | 16.4 | 7.5 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 47.0 | 28.8 | 37.9 | 19.4 |
| 50-70 percent | 18.0 | 14.9 | 13.5 | 2.1 |
| 71-85 percent | 22.4 | 17.8 | 16.3 | 7.8 |
| More than 85 percent | 20.4 | 12.2 | 10.2 | 0 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 23.0 | 25.0 | 23.8 | 6.9 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 26.9 | 16.5 | 14.9 | 6.4 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 25.6 | 11.0 | 15.9 | 6.1 |
| More than 60 percent | 26.7 | 13.3 | 20.0 | 6.7 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 34. Factors in admission: percent of colleges attributing “considerable importance” to factors by institutional characteristics, 2004. (continued)

| | Interview | Student's demonstrated interest | Subject tests (SAT II, AP, IB) | State examination results |
|--|------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Total | 8.7 | 6.9 | 4.9 | 6.4% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 1.2 | 3.0 | 4.2 | 8.8 |
| Private | 12.5 | 8.6 | 5.3 | 5.0 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 5.3 | 8.1 | 0 | 8.3 |
| Four-year | 9.0 | 6.6 | 5.3 | 5.0 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 12.4 | 9.2 | 3.3 | 4.9 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 2.1 | 4.2 | 6.4 | 4.3 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 0 | 7.8 | 2.0 | 12.0 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 11.1 | 0 | 11.1 | 37.5 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 20,000 or more | 0 | 0 | 8.3 | 0 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 7.7 | 7.7 | 6.3 | 7.9 |
| Middle States | 13.0 | 6.0 | 3.1 | 10.5 |
| South | 2.2 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 5.4 |
| Midwest | 10.1 | 5.4 | 2.7 | 6.2 |
| Southwest | 16.7 | 5.6 | 0 | 0 |
| West | 6.1 | 7.5 | 9.1 | 0 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 16.9 | 13.4 | 13.8 | 6.3 |
| 50-70 percent | 2.8 | 5.0 | 2.1 | 6.5 |
| 71-85 percent | 9.3 | 7.8 | 3.3 | 8.7 |
| More than 85 percent | 10.2 | 6.1 | 4.2 | 2.1 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 6.9 | 7.0 | 8.0 | 3.0 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 9.2 | 5.3 | 2.7 | 6.5 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 4.9 | 8.5 | 3.7 | 6.4 |
| More than 60 percent | 15.2 | 15.6 | 6.8 | 13.6 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 34. Factors in admission: percent of colleges attributing “considerable importance” to factors by institutional characteristics, 2004. (continued)

| | Race/Ethnicity | Ability to pay | State or county of residence | Alumni Relations |
|--|----------------|----------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| Total | 2.2 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.4% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 1.2 | 1.2 | 4.2 | 0 |
| Private | 2.7 | 1.8 | .3 | 2.1 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 0 | 2.8 | 0 | 0 |
| Four-year | 2.4 | 1.5 | 1.8 | 1.5 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 2.0 | 2.4 | .4 | 2.0 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 6.3 | 0 | 0 | 2.1 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 0 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 0 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 11.1 | 0 | 11.1 | 0 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 20,000 or more | 8.3 | 0 | 8.3 | 0 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 1.5 | 0 | 0 | 3.1 |
| Middle States | 19.2 | 2.0 | 1.0 | 0 |
| South | 9.7 | 3.2 | 3.3 | 0 |
| Midwest | 16.8 | 1.3 | .7 | 2.0 |
| Southwest | 16.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| West | 22.7 | 1.5 | 4.5 | 3.0 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 7.5 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 4.5 |
| 50-70 percent | 2.2 | 2.9 | .7 | .7 |
| 71-85 percent | 1.3 | .7 | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| More than 85 percent | 2.0 | 0 | 2.0 | 2.0 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 1.0 | 1.0 | 0 | 1.0 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 2.1 | .5 | 1.1 | 2.1 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 6.1 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 1.2 |
| More than 60 percent | 2.2 | 4.4 | 0 | 2.2 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

The Factors In-Depth

Grades in College Prep Courses

“Grades in college preparatory courses” generally defined means college and university evaluations of the strength a student’s academic record in high school. Overall grade point averages are generally reliable indicators of a student’s performance in his or her courses, but they are incomplete measures of the strength of the student’s coursework. College and university admission officers seek to make distinctions between similarly qualified students, and one way to do so is to compare them based on the strength of their curriculum. “College prep courses” include Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment, and other advanced/college-level coursework.

In 2003, the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) found that students “who had a more rigorous high school curriculum and achieved

better grades in high school...were more likely to complete college.”¹⁴ About 80 percent of students with the most challenging curriculum completed college, compared to the national average of 59 percent for all students and 47 percent for students with the least challenging curriculum. As Table 35 shows, there are significant differences in the rates of participation in college preparatory courses between high schools with differing characteristics.

In 2004, the U.S. Department of Education found that 38 of the 50 states maintain dual enrollment policies, allowing high school students to enroll in postsecondary education to obtain advanced credit before entering college. In 18 states, schools are required to offer dual enrollment to students. Each state has differing criteria students must meet to qualify for dual enrollment, and most colleges have differing policies about which credits they will accept as a substitute for college-level work.¹⁵

Table 35. Mean percent of students enrolled in college preparatory curriculum, 2004.

| | Mean percent of students that took AP courses | Mean percent of students that participated in IB curriculum | Mean percent of students that participated in enriched curriculum | Mean percent of students that participated in dual enrollment programs |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| All schools | 26.4 | 1.7 | 38.7 | 7.4% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 17.5 | 1.1 | 29.3 | 8.4 |
| All Private | 40.7 | 1.6 | 51.9 | 5.1 |
| Private Non-Parochial | 49.0 | 4.5 | 58.5 | 4.3 |
| Private Parochial | 29.6 | .4 | 48.2 | 7.9 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | | | |
| 0 to 25% | 21.4 | .80 | 32.1 | 7.7 |
| 26 to 50% | 11.7 | 2.3 | 25.0 | 13.0 |
| 51 to 100% | 11.6 | .72 | 21.2 | 6.2 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 500 students | 29.3 | 1.5 | 42.3 | 9.4 |
| 500 to 999 students | 28.5 | 1.8 | 40.2 | 6.7 |
| 1,000 to 1,499 students | 21.5 | 1.2 | 34.6 | 7.4 |
| 1,500 to 1,999 students | 24.9 | 2.2 | 38.0 | 5.8 |
| More than 2,000 | 20.8 | 2.5 | 30.6 | 5.5 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 36.9 | .27 | 55.1 | 7.8 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 32.8 | 1.8 | 46.4 | 7.7 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 24.6 | 1.8 | 36.6 | 6.9 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 19.4 | 1.7 | 30.8 | 8.2 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 24.1 | 1.0 | 34.8 | 8.9 |
| More than 500:1 | 24.9 | 2.5 | 40.3 | 5.2 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

¹⁴ U.S. General Accounting Office. (2003, May). *College Completion: Additional Efforts Could Help Education with Its Completion Goals*, Report Number GAO 03-568. p.11. Washington, DC.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (2004). *State Dual Enrollment Policies: Addressing Access and Quality*. Washington, DC.

Table 36. Mean number of high school course units required and recommended by colleges, 2004.

| | Total Academic Units | | History | | English | | Foreign Language | |
|--|----------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|
| | Required | Recommended | Required | Recommended | Required | Recommended | Required | Recommended |
| All respondents | 15.91 | 17.52 | 1.60 | 2.02 | 3.94 | 3.93 | 2.06 | 2.33 |
| Control | | | | | | | | |
| Public institutions | 16.21 | 17.45 | 1.48 | 1.81 | 3.97 | 3.92 | 2.00 | 2.22 |
| Private institutions | 15.66 | 17.56 | 1.70 | 2.11 | 3.91 | 3.93 | 2.11 | 2.39 |
| Institution Type | | | | | | | | |
| 2-Year | 16.63 | 16.63 | 1.66 | 1.86 | 4.00 | 3.88 | 1.96 | 2.00 |
| 4-Year | 15.83 | 17.78 | 1.60 | 2.05 | 3.93 | 3.95 | 2.06 | 2.38 |
| Enrollment | | | | | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 15.78 | 17.28 | 1.65 | 2.07 | 3.93 | 3.91 | 2.07 | 2.27 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 16.12 | 17.83 | 1.53 | 1.79 | 3.94 | 3.92 | 2.06 | 2.42 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 16.01 | 17.99 | 1.62 | 2.09 | 3.94 | 3.98 | 2.10 | 2.39 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 16.05 | 17.88 | 1.57 | 2.06 | 3.96 | 3.96 | 2.02 | 2.30 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 16.02 | 18.50 | 1.55 | 1.20 | 3.96 | 4.00 | 1.94 | 2.55 |
| 20,000 or more | 16.36 | 18.82 | 1.24 | 1.60 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 1.97 | 2.86 |
| Selectivity | | | | | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 15.79 | 18.34 | 1.86 | 2.45 | 3.92 | 3.91 | 2.19 | 2.92 |
| 50-70 percent | 16.16 | 17.92 | 1.50 | 2.06 | 3.95 | 3.95 | 2.10 | 2.41 |
| 71-85 percent | 15.84 | 17.71 | 1.60 | 2.03 | 3.97 | 3.98 | 2.06 | 2.34 |
| More than 85 percent | 15.72 | 17.13 | 1.62 | 1.82 | 3.90 | 3.94 | 1.95 | 2.11 |
| Yield | | | | | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 16.24 | 18.17 | 1.63 | 2.29 | 4.00 | 3.90 | 2.15 | 2.55 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 15.86 | 17.82 | 1.60 | 2.02 | 3.95 | 4.00 | 2.05 | 2.45 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 15.79 | 17.53 | 1.50 | 2.00 | 3.96 | 3.95 | 2.04 | 2.30 |
| More than 60 percent | 15.61 | 16.56 | 1.72 | 1.90 | 3.86 | 3.92 | 2.13 | 2.07 |

Source: College Board Annual Survey/Common Data Set, 2003-2004.

What coursework do colleges require?

Table 36 below displays the mean number of “units” (or years) of study in core high school courses required and recommended for students who wish to enroll in college. Colleges and universities place the highest priority on English (3.94 units), academic electives (3.68) and math (2.86).

Requirements for entry into different types of institutions do not differ widely, but recommended amounts of coursework can vary by more than a year between, for instance, the most and least selective institutions. While units of study are helpful in determining how much time should be spent in each subject area in high school, Table 36 does not include analysis of the level of coursework required or recommended by each type of college (three years of math ending in Calculus, for instance, versus three years of math ending in trigonometry).

Table 36. Mean number of high school course units required and recommended by colleges, 2004. (continued)

| | Math | | Academic Elective | | Social Studies | | Science | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Required | Recommended | Required | Recommended | Required | Recommended | Required | Recommended |
| All respondents | 2.86 | 3.22 | 3.68 | 3.54 | 2.35 | 2.61 | 2.36 | 2.86 |
| Control | | | | | | | | |
| Public institutions | 2.99 | 3.21 | 3.57 | 3.78 | 2.45 | 2.61 | 2.51 | 2.85 |
| Private institutions | 2.72 | 3.22 | 3.79 | 3.38 | 2.26 | 2.61 | 2.22 | 2.86 |
| Institution Type | | | | | | | | |
| 2-Year | 2.90 | 2.92 | 5.10 | 4.37 | 2.62 | 2.52 | 2.57 | 2.62 |
| 4-Year | 2.85 | 3.32 | 3.53 | 3.31 | 2.32 | 2.64 | 2.33 | 2.94 |
| Enrollment | | | | | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 2.77 | 3.14 | 3.93 | 3.58 | 2.32 | 2.58 | 2.31 | 2.84 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 2.94 | 3.32 | 3.64 | 3.42 | 3.42 | 2.49 | 2.38 | 2.81 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 2.97 | 3.36 | 3.72 | 3.48 | 2.47 | 2.69 | 2.57 | 2.95 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 2.96 | 3.30 | 3.12 | 3.10 | 2.30 | 2.97 | 2.46 | 2.86 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 3.00 | 3.51 | 2.89 | 3.92 | 2.21 | 2.88 | 2.44 | 3.13 |
| 20,000 or more | 3.05 | 3.86 | 2.79 | 3.00 | 2.39 | 3.17 | 2.15 | 3.05 |
| Selectivity | | | | | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 2.81 | 3.62 | 3.38 | 2.96 | 2.33 | 2.83 | 2.23 | 3.10 |
| 50-70 percent | 2.94 | 3.39 | 3.53 | 3.58 | 2.29 | 2.59 | 2.43 | 3.03 |
| 71-85 percent | 2.86 | 3.34 | 3.51 | 3.36 | 2.36 | 2.65 | 2.31 | 2.95 |
| More than 85 percent | 2.84 | 3.03 | 4.09 | 3.27 | 2.33 | 2.54 | 2.35 | 2.71 |
| Yield | | | | | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 2.92 | 3.46 | 3.35 | 3.22 | 2.31 | 2.73 | 2.25 | 2.97 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 2.85 | 3.40 | 3.68 | 2.93 | 2.28 | 2.70 | 2.34 | 3.01 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 2.92 | 3.23 | 3.71 | 3.46 | 2.50 | 2.49 | 2.44 | 2.85 |
| More than 60 percent | 2.82 | 3.08 | 3.60 | 3.89 | 2.31 | 2.57 | 2.33 | 2.74 |

Source: College Board Annual Survey/Common Data Set, 2003-2004.

The 2004 NACAC Counseling Trends Survey asked high schools to report the number of years of study in five subject areas required for graduation. On the whole, high schools in the Counseling Trends Survey sample—which is slightly over-representative of private high schools—matched or exceeded colleges' requirements for years of study in four of the five subject areas. Public high schools require very little instruction in foreign languages, which caused the aggregate total of required years of study to fall short of colleges' requirements.

Again, absent from these data is any description of the level of coursework required by high schools within in core subject areas. While the years of study are generally aligned with college admission requirements, there is no information in these data about whether course content and rigor are sufficient to meet college requirements.

Table 37. Mean number of years of study, between grades 9 and 12, high school requires for graduation, 2004.

| | Mean number of years of English | Mean number of years of Math | Mean number of years of Science | Mean number of years of Social Studies | Mean number of years of Foreign Language |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| All schools | 3.96 | 3.02 | 2.81 | 3.19 | 1.36 |
| Control | | | | | |
| Public | 3.93 | 2.89 | 2.75 | 3.22 | .69 |
| All Private | 4.01 | 3.24 | 2.91 | 3.13 | 2.52 |
| Private Non-Parochial | 4.01 | 3.26 | 2.93 | 3.11 | 2.80 |
| Private Parochial | 4.01 | 3.20 | 2.87 | 3.17 | 2.05 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | | | | |
| 0 to 25% | 3.93 | 2.86 | 2.73 | 3.23 | .66 |
| 26 to 50% | 3.91 | 2.87 | 2.70 | 3.18 | .54 |
| 51 to 100% | 3.96 | 3.13 | 2.96 | 3.24 | .97 |
| Enrollment | | | | | |
| Less than 500 students | 3.97 | 3.09 | 2.85 | 3.19 | 1.77 |
| 500 to 999 | 3.97 | 3.05 | 2.86 | 3.18 | 1.46 |
| 1,000 to 1,499 | 3.93 | 3.03 | 2.77 | 3.14 | 1.16 |
| 1,500 to 1,999 | 3.96 | 2.90 | 2.80 | 3.28 | .83 |
| More than 2,000 | 3.93 | 2.78 | 2.59 | 3.14 | .73 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | | | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 4.00 | 3.25 | 2.88 | 3.23 | 2.40 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 3.99 | 3.09 | 2.79 | 3.11 | 1.90 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 3.97 | 2.99 | 2.83 | 3.19 | 1.15 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 3.92 | 2.91 | 2.76 | 3.23 | .88 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 3.95 | 2.93 | 2.71 | 3.17 | .96 |
| More than 500:1 | 3.91 | 3.09 | 2.95 | 3.31 | 1.44 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004

Table 38. Importance of standardized test scores in admission by institutional characteristics, 2004.

| | Considerable Importance | Moderate Importance | Limited Importance | No Importance |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Total | 60.3 | 27.5 | 5.4 | 6.8% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 60.5 | 16.2 | 8.4 | 15.0 |
| Private | 60.0 | 33.3 | 3.9 | 2.7 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 23.7 | 5.3 | 10.5 | 60.5 |
| Four-year | 63.2 | 29.4 | 5.0 | 2.4 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 55.2 | 34.1 | 5.2 | 5.6 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 58.3 | 25.0 | 4.2 | 12.5 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 67.3 | 17.3 | 5.8 | 9.6 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 44.4 | 22.2 | 11.1 | 22.2 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 77.8 | 11.1 | 11.1 | 0.0 |
| 20,000 or more | 91.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 8.3 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 32.3 | 52.3 | 7.7 | 7.7 |
| Middle States | 56.0 | 27.0 | 8.0 | 9.0 |
| South | 78.3 | 17.4 | 4.3 | 0.0 |
| Midwest | 68.4 | 22.4 | 2.0 | 7.2 |
| Southwest | 66.7 | 27.8 | 5.6 | 0.0 |
| West | 46.3 | 31.3 | 9.0 | 13.4 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 61.2 | 23.9 | 9.0 | 6.0 |
| 50-70 percent | 59.4 | 23.6 | 4.2 | 2.8 |
| 71-85 percent | 59.5 | 29.4 | 6.5 | 4.6 |
| More than 85 percent | 51.0 | 20.4 | 2.0 | 26.5 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 55.9 | 38.2 | 3.9 | 2.0 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 59.8 | 31.7 | 5.3 | 3.2 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 66.7 | 17.3 | 4.9 | 11.1 |
| More than 60 percent | 54.3 | 13.0 | 13.0 | 19.6 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

On average, 61 percent of enrolled freshman submitted their SAT scores for admittance into college, and 50 percent submitted their ACT scores. Students who enrolled in private, four-year colleges with high selectivity and low yield were the most likely to submit their SAT scores.

Table 39. Mean percent of enrolled first-year students who submitted standardized test scores for admission consideration by, institutional characteristics, 2003.

| | Percent Submitted SAT Scores | Percent Submitted ACT Scores |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| All respondents | 61.0 | 49.7% |
| Control | | |
| Public institutions | 57.1 | 51.0 |
| Private institutions | 63.4 | 49.0 |
| Institution Type | | |
| 2-Year | 35.6 | 45.1 |
| 4-Year | 63.9 | 50.5 |
| Enrollment | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 58.7 | 50.4 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 69.3 | 42.6 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 62.3 | 52.1 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 64.4 | 48.1 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 56.5 | 56.0 |
| 20,000 or more | 76.7 | 48.1 |
| Selectivity | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 80.2 | 30.5 |
| 50-70 percent | 69.9 | 43.2 |
| 71-85 percent | 62.7 | 50.4 |
| More than 85 percent | 43.0 | 60.7 |
| Yield | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 75.1 | 36.0 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 68.5 | 45.4 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 57.4 | 54.9 |
| More than 60 percent | 45.1 | 58.2 |

Source: College Board Annual Survey/Common Data Set, 2003-2004.

SAT and ACT scores submitted to colleges vary widely based on institutional characteristics. Private, highly selective four-year colleges are most likely to enroll students with high standardized test scores. Institutions that are not highly selective and have small enrollments are more likely to enroll students with lower standardized test scores. (See Table 40)

Table 40. Profile of standardized test scores of enrolled first-year students by institutional characteristics, 2003-04.

| | 25th Percentile-- SAT Verbal | 75th Percentile-- SAT Verbal | 25th Percentile-- SAT Math | 75th Percentile-- SAT Math | 25th Percentile-- ACT Composite | 75th Percentile ACT Composite |
|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| All respondents | 479 | 589 | 479 | 591 | 20 | 25 |
| Control | | | | | | |
| Public institutions | 459 | 568 | 464 | 575 | 19 | 24 |
| Private institutions | 490 | 601 | 487 | 599 | 20 | 26 |
| Institution Type | | | | | | |
| 2-Year | 415 | 528 | 410 | 526 | 16 | 22 |
| 4-Year | 483 | 593 | 483 | 595 | 20 | 25 |
| Enrollment | | | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 476 | 589 | 471 | 586 | 19 | 25 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 484 | 586 | 487 | 592 | 19 | 24 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 483 | 587 | 489 | 596 | 20 | 25 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 478 | 587 | 491 | 599 | 19 | 24 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 481 | 592 | 493 | 606 | 20 | 25 |
| 20,000 or more | 502 | 613 | 524 | 637 | 21 | 26 |
| Selectivity | | | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 556 | 655 | 566 | 664 | 23 | 28 |
| 50-70 percent | 481 | 590 | 485 | 594 | 20 | 25 |
| 71-85 percent | 472 | 583 | 470 | 584 | 20 | 25 |
| More than 85 percent | 454 | 569 | 449 | 570 | 19 | 24 |
| Yield | | | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 491 | 595 | 494 | 600 | 21 | 26 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 492 | 598 | 492 | 601 | 20 | 26 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 466 | 582 | 465 | 583 | 19 | 25 |
| More than 60 percent | 466 | 584 | 463 | 585 | 19 | 24 |

Source: College Board Annual Survey/Common Data Set, 2003-2004.

Grades in All Courses

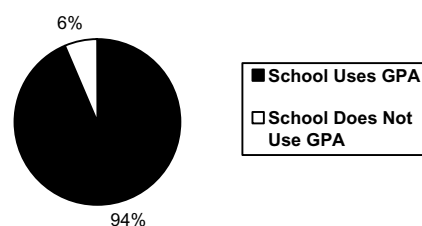
As mentioned above, “grades in all courses” is the overall indicator of a student’s performance in his or her high school coursework. Ninety-four percent of high schools responding to the NACAC Counseling Trends Survey reported using grade point averages. (See Figure 14)

Of the 94 percent of schools that calculate grade point averages, 69 percent “weight” student GPAs to account for advanced level coursework, often automatically adding a point or fraction of a point to each GPA for an advanced course.

Are there differences between schools that weight grades and those that do not?

Table 41 indicates that there is not a substantial difference between the percentage of public and private schools that weight grade point averages.

Figure 14. Percent of high schools that assign grade point averages, 2004.



Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 41. Percent of schools that use weighted vs. un-weighted grade point averages, 2004.

| | Weighted GPAs | Un-weighted GPAs |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| All schools | 69.2 | 30.8% |
| Control | | |
| Public | 70.1 | 29.9 |
| Private | 67.8 | 32.2 |
| Private Non-Parochial | 59.6 | 40.4 |
| Private Parochial | 80.8 | 19.2 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | |
| 0 to 25% | 76.2 | 23.8 |
| 26 to 50% | 57.1 | 42.9 |
| 51 to 100% | 62.8 | 37.2 |
| Enrollment | | |
| Less than 500 students | 53.0 | 47.0 |
| 500 to 999 students | 70.8 | 29.2 |
| 1,000 to 1,499 students | 75.5 | 24.5 |
| 1,500 to 1,999 students | 83.2 | 16.8 |
| More than 2,000 students | 90.9 | 9.1 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 60.0 | 40.0 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 66.7 | 33.3 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 73.3 | 26.7 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 70.6 | 29.4 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 62.3 | 37.7 |
| More than 500:1 | 68.1 | 31.9 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

Schools with small enrollments, whether public or private, are significantly less likely to weight grade averages than schools with larger enrollments. Small schools, particularly those with fewer than 500 students, may be less likely to weight grade averages because they have more uniformity of curriculum, whether that curriculum is consistently college preparatory (in the case of a small, private school) or is consistent in a more standard curriculum (small, rural public schools).

Indeed, schools with higher percentages of students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses and in dual enrollment courses with local two- or four-year colleges are slightly less likely to weight their students' grade point averages than small schools with fewer students in Advanced Placement or dual enrollment courses.

Regardless, high schools both public and private routinely weight their grade averages, attempting to differentiate advanced coursework from standard in a way that can be interpreted with some consistency within the school's context.

How Have Grades Changed Over Time?

Are there really more qualified students in the college pipeline, or is grade inflation rampant?

A mean increase has been evident in all high school graduates in GPA over the last ten years. The average GPA of graduates has increased from 2.68 in 1990 to 2.94 in 2000. The increase has occurred across all races, ethnicities and genders. Females have slightly outpaced their male counterparts with an increased average GPA from 1990 to 2000. In 1990, female high school graduates earned a mean GPA of 2.77, which rose to 3.05 in 2000. Alternatively, males earned a mean of 2.59 in 1990 and 2.83 in 2000.¹⁶

There has been discussion among education researchers whether the mean GPA increase is the result of grade inflation. The Higher Education Research Institute, in its "American Freshman: Thirty-Five Year Trends" report, noted that grade inflation has become much more common in the last three decades. According to the report, "among freshmen entering college during the late 1960s, 'C' grades outnumbered 'A' grades by 20.7 percent to 17.7 percent. This balance began changing in the early 1970s and has continued to the point where 'A' grades now outnumber 'C' grades by seven to one!"¹⁷ This is the primary reason why grades in college prep courses are the top factor in the admission process, rather than overall GPA. However, throughout the 1990s, the number of course credits earned by high school graduates have also increased from an average of 23.5 in 1990 to 26.2 in 2000. Compared to

¹⁶ Perkins, R., Kleiner, B., Roey, S. and Brown, J. (2004). The High School Transcript Study: *A Decade of Change in Curricula and Achievement, 1990–2000*. NCES 2004-455, US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC.

¹⁷ Astin, A.W., Oseguera, L., Sax, L.J., Korn, W.S. (2002). *The American Freshman: Thirty-Five Year Trends*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

1990, high school graduates earned more course credits in all four core academic subjects.¹⁸

Currently, there are no conclusive results on whether the grade increase is due to teachers' standards for grading, or course material being taught, or if the GPA increase is purely due to student achievement.

Class Rank

Sixty-one percent of high schools nationwide maintain a system of class rank, where students are ranked by their overall grade point averages. Three broad questions framed the discussion of class rank in 2004.

What types of schools use class rank?

Ranking students by academic performance measures, almost always by the students' grade point averages, is almost exclusively a function of the school's public/private status. As Table 42 shows, more than 4/5 of public high schools (85 percent) use class rank, compared to 1/5 of private schools (19 percent).

Table 42. Percent of schools where class rank is used, 2004.

| | Use Class Rank | Do Not Use Class Rank |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| All schools | 61.0 | 39.0% |
| Control | | |
| Public | 85.1 | 14.9 |
| All Private | 18.5 | 81.5 |
| <i>Private Non-Parochial</i> | 8.8 | 91.2 |
| <i>Private Parochial</i> | 35.4 | 64.6 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | |
| 0 to 25% | 77.9 | 22.1 |
| 26 to 50% | 98.2 | 1.8 |
| 51 to 100% | 93.8 | 6.3 |
| Enrollment | | |
| Less than 500 students | 48.1 | 51.9 |
| 500 to 999 students | 58.2 | 41.8 |
| 1,000 to 1,499 students | 66.3 | 33.7 |
| 1,500 to 1,999 students | 76.0 | 24.0 |
| More than 2,000 students | 84.8 | 15.2 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 31.8 | 68.2 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 33.1 | 66.9 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 66.7 | 33.3 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 79.4 | 20.6 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 69.0 | 31.0 |
| More than 500:1 | 62.3 | 37.7 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

¹⁸ Perkins, R., Kleiner, B., Roey, S. and Brown, J. (2004). *The High School Transcript Study: A Decade of Change in Curricula and Achievement, 1990–2000*. NCES 2004-455, US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC.

¹⁹ In a linear regression equation using “percent of 2003 graduates attending four-year college” as the dependent variable, not having class rank corresponded with a 20 percent increase in the number of students attending four-year colleges. The same equation showed a separate and distinct increase of 25 percent if a school is private. These two variables alone explained almost 50 percent of the difference in the percent of students moving on to four-year colleges in our respondent pool. (R2=.46)

What about private schools make them less likely to use class rank? While small enrollment size is statistically interrelated to the public/private status of the school, it is also a contributing factor to whether a school chooses to rank its students. Attempting to rank a graduating class of 40 seniors significantly understates the accomplishments of the student who may be ranked 30th, but who achieved at a high level academically.

Furthermore, private high schools may be more aware of the declining influence of class rank in the admission decision at colleges and universities. Over the past 15 years, colleges have been assigning a declining level of importance to class rank. Class rank is a “tertiary” measure of student performance, in that it is based on the grade point average, which is a secondary measure of the grades that students have received in their coursework. Grade point averages are secondary because most grade point averages are weighted, meaning that colleges and universities must dig deeper than the GPA to determine the strength of a student’s curriculum before comparing that student to other students from different schools with similar GPAs.

Admission officers report that even in larger graduating classes, the difference in academic qualifications of the student who finished at the

top of the class may be virtually indistinguishable to the student who finished 20th or 30th. Accordingly, admission officers rate class rank as a distant fourth factor behind the strength of curriculum/grades in college prep courses, the standardized admission tests, and the overall GPA.

Does class rank help or hurt students in college admission?

Because class rank has declined in importance over the past 15 years, a student’s rank can safely be described as a supplement to his or her core academic record. Anecdotal evidence and common sense suggest that a student’s rank among peers at a particular high school has less bearing on the admission decision than the student’s rank among other applicants to a college, a notion that admission officers often confirm.

Examining class rank data from the Counseling Trends Survey yields the provocative, though not conclusive, suggestion that not having class rank is correlated with a higher percentage of graduates attending four-year colleges.

While private schools typically have higher four-year college attendance rates among graduates and are more likely not to use class rank, analysis of survey data shows that the absence of class rank is associated with higher college-going rates independent of a school’s public/private status.¹⁹

Table 43. Use of class rank and percent of students who attend 4-year colleges, 2004.

| High School Uses Class Rank? | Average Percent of Graduating Seniors Who Attend 4-Year Colleges |
|------------------------------|--|
| Yes | 52% |
| No | 91 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

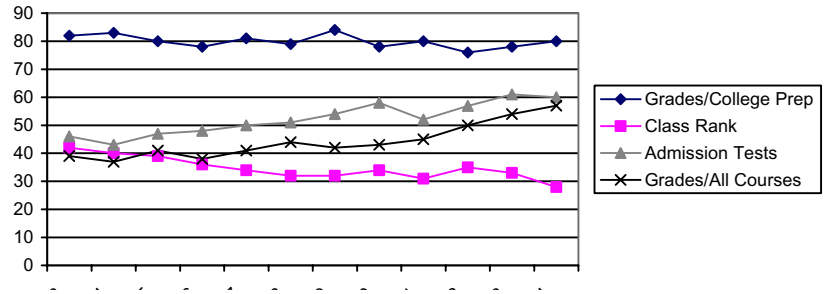
Is there are trend toward or away from class rank?

Since NACAC's Counseling Trends Survey data on the number of schools that rank their students is only two years old, no meaningful statistical conclusions can be drawn that support a trend either toward or away from the use of class rank. For the two years that the class rank question has been asked of a representative sample of public and private high schools, the data have been virtually identical. If any conclusion can be drawn, it is that there has been no groundswell trend in either direction.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that high schools, particularly public high schools, are slowly moving away from class rank. News coverage of the issue in 2004 suggested that ending "cutthroat" competition and ensuring that students are not disadvantaged in the college admission process are the most oft-cited reasons for abandoning class rank.

As part of college and universities' admission decisions, class rank has continued a steady decline in importance over the past 15 years. (See Figure 15)

Figure 15. Trends in the top four factors in admission, 1993-2004.



On the other hand, the U.S. Supreme Court case involving the University of Michigan's use of race in the admission decision breathed new life into percent-admission plans, which are currently in use in California, Texas and Florida. Such plans rely exclusively on class rank, and could add a new dimension to its consideration in the admission decision across the country if implemented in other states.

State Exit Exams

State exit exams are poised to play an increasingly important role in college admission, if for no other reason that in an increasing number of states, students must pass such an exam to receive a high school diploma. And since a high school diploma is a long-standing requirement for admission to a college or university, students who do not pass the exit exam may be inadmissible in many places and are currently ineligible for federal financial aid.

The majority of colleges (59 percent) place no importance on state exit exams as a factor in admission. Colleges that are most likely to place some level of importance on college exit exams are four-year institutions (41 percent), private institutions (47 percent), institutions with enrollments of fewer than 3,000 students (47 percent), and institutions in New England (65 percent) and the Middle States (56 percent).

NACAC's Counseling Trends Survey revealed that 60 percent of public schools require students to pass an exit exam in order to graduate from high school.

National studies released in 2004 confirm these findings. As of this report's publication, 24 states either currently have exit exams for high school graduates or will have exams by 2008. Nationally, more than half of all public

high school students must pass exit exams in order to graduate.²⁰

Shortcomings of State Graduation Exams as Admission Indicators

Lack of consistency, rigor. Some critics of the exams say they are not as rigorous as they should be and do not have high enough cut-off scores. Those who consider test results to be sub-standard academically identify a potential shortcoming for using graduation test results as indicators of academic achievement or predictors of postsecondary success. In a 2004 report, Achieve, Inc., took issue with the academic rigor of graduation tests.

"To pass math tests, students in these states need to successfully answer questions that, on average, cover material students in most other countries study in seventh or eighth grade. To pass English language arts tests, students need to successfully answer questions that ACT considers more appropriate for the test it gives to eighth and ninth graders than its college admissions test."²¹

The tests vary widely on a state-by-state basis, each with different cut-off scores and topics covered. As such, state test scores are applicable only to students from each individual

²⁰ Center on Education Policy. (2004, May). *Pay Now or Pay Later: the Hidden Costs of High School Exit Exams*. Washington, DC.

²¹ Achieve, Inc. (2004). *Do Graduation Tests Measure Up? A Closer Look at State High School Exit Exams*. Washington, DC.

Table 44. Mean percent of schools requiring students to pass standardized tests as a prerequisite to graduating from high school, 2004.

| | Percent of Schools that Require Students to Pass Standardized Test to Graduate | Percent of Schools that Do Not Require Students to Pass Standardized Tests to Graduate |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| All schools | 40.0 | 60.0% |
| Control | | |
| Public | 59.0 | 41.0 |
| All Private | 6.4 | 93.6 |
| <i>Private Non-Parochial</i> | 4.8 | 95.2 |
| <i>Private Parochial</i> | 9.2 | 90.8 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | |
| 0 to 25% | 61.6 | 38.4 |
| 26 to 50% | 47.3 | 52.7 |
| 51 to 100% | 60.0 | 40.0 |
| Enrollment | | |
| Less than 500 students | 19.0 | 81.0 |
| 500 to 999 | 36.1 | 63.9 |
| 1,000 to 1,499 | 51.2 | 48.8 |
| 1,500 to 1,999 | 65.0 | 35.0 |
| More than 2,000 | 70.7 | 29.3 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 4.5 | 95.5 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 26.2 | 73.8 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 39.7 | 60.3 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 45.5 | 54.5 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 54.3 | 45.7 |
| More than 500:1 | 45.2 | 54.8 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

state, and colleges would have to invest significant time and effort in determining how each state's scoring system and tests stack up against other states. Therefore, state graduation tests present little in the way of a "national yardstick" that standardized admission tests are already perceived to provide.

Controversial methods, uncertain results.

A substantial amount of literature is written each year over the issue of standardized testing, and whether standardized tests measure anything more than a student's capacity to take a standardized test.

A 2003 policy brief from WestEd, questions whether there is fairness to having all students take one test to measure their ability to master all that is taught high school, especially students with low socioeconomic status, and minority populations. The brief cites, "In Indiana, 65 percent of all students passed the mathematics portion of the exam, but only 31 percent of African Americans and 46 percent of Latino students passed."²²

In light of findings like these, some researchers wonder whether the massive financial

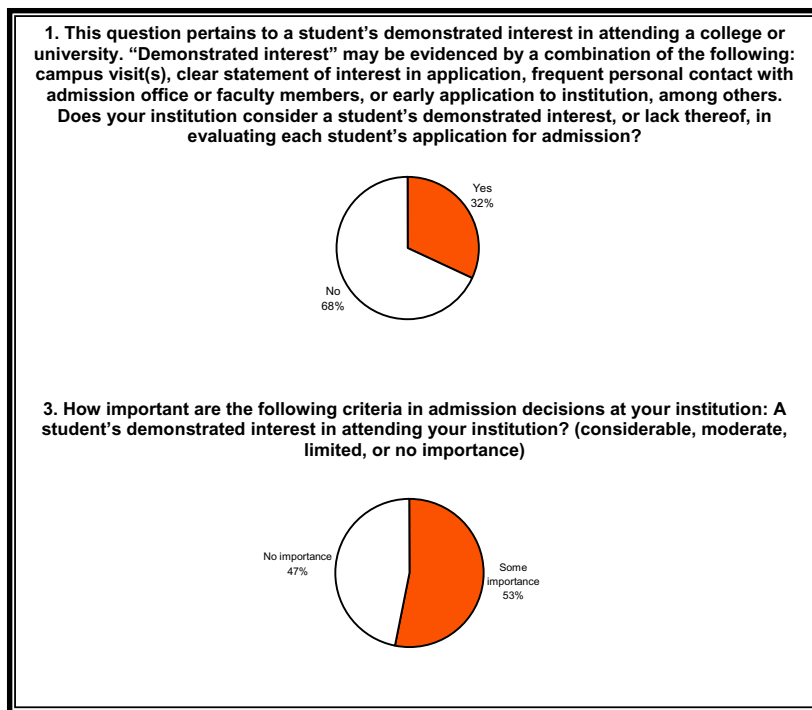
and resource investment in K-12 testing will succumb to high costs and diminishing returns. According to a 2004 report by the Center on Education Policy,

"Although state policymakers may view exit exams as a low-cost way to raise student achievement, the extra costs of helping students pass these exams are considerable. To simply maintain the state's current level of exit exam performance an estimated \$171 per student per year in Minnesota, a state with an 8th grade exam; \$385 in Massachusetts, a state with a more rigorous 10th grade exam; and \$557 in Indiana, a state with a 10th grade exam of average difficulty."²³

²² WestEd, (2003). *Making Sure Exit Exams Get a Passing Grade*. Policy Brief. Washington, DC.

²³ Center on Education Policy. (2004, May). *Pay Now or Pay Later: the Hidden Costs of High School Exit Exams*. Washington, DC.

Figure 16. Institutional responses to admission trends survey demonstrated interest questions, 2004.



Though colleges are not likely to invest significant energy into using state exams as indicators of student admissibility until the implications of exam results are more fully understood, some institutions clearly take the scores into account, whether out of necessity (in the case of determining whether a student has completed high school) or out of convenience or practicality (in cases where exam scores may be considered as an evaluation tool).

Demonstrated Interest

In 2002–03, high school counselors and college admission officers identified the issue of a student's demonstrated interest in attending a college or university (as perceived by the

admission officer) as one of rising prominence in the admission decision. Although there is no commonly agreed-upon definition for the term, "demonstrated interest" is best described as the admission office's evaluation of how committed the student is to attending the institution if accepted. There is no standardized way to compute or tabulate a student's interest in attending the institution, but some examples of ways in which colleges and universities may ascertain a student's interest are campus visits, content of open-ended essays, contact by the student with the admission office, letters of recommendation, and early application through either early action or early decision.

The Admission Trends Survey asked several questions of colleges and universities in an attempt to gauge roughly how important this concept is in the admission decision.

When asked directly, only 32 percent of colleges indicated that they consider demonstrated interest a factor in the admission process. However, as colleges ranked a whole array of factors in the admission process, 53 percent assigned some level of importance (considerable, moderate or limited) to a student's interest in attending the institution.

Why would a majority of colleges consider a student's interest in attending as part of the admission process?

Table 45 provides some insight into the reasons colleges cited for this consideration. Colleges most often noted that considering demonstrated interest is part of a holistic review of individual applications for admission,

Table 45. Reasons for considering demonstrated interest as a factor in admission by institutional characteristics, 2004.

| | Allows institution to assess what students will be the "right fit" academically | Allows institution to better assess its yield for the coming year | Allows institution to accept only applicants who appear genuinely interested attending if accepted | Is part of institution's effort to conduct an individualized, holistic review of applications |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| Total | 69.8 | 42.8 | 20.8 | 83.0% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 58.3 | 33.3 | 25.0 | 87.5 |
| Private | 72.2 | 49.4 | 20.3 | 82.7 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 100 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 100 |
| Four-year | 69.7 | 42.6 | 20.6 | 83.2 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 75.5 | 47.1 | 17.6 | 81.4 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 38.5 | 23.1 | 15.4 | 84.6 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 58.3 | 33.3 | 25.0 | 91.7 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 66.7 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 100 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 100 | 0 | 100 | 100 |
| 20,000 or more | 100 | 100 | 0 | 100 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 61.5 | 34.6 | 7.7 | 80.8 |
| Middle States | 67.4 | 25.6 | 27.9 | 88.4 |
| South | 95.7 | 65.2 | 26.1 | 82.6 |
| Midwest | 66.7 | 44.4 | 19.4 | 77.8 |
| Southwest | 62.5 | 50.0 | 12.5 | 100 |
| West | 63.2 | 52.6 | 15.8 | 78.9 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 54.5 | 33.3 | 39.4 | 87.9 |
| 50-70 percent | 61.8 | 44.1 | 17.6 | 79.4 |
| 71-85 percent | 82.5 | 50.9 | 15.8 | 86.0 |
| More than 85 percent | 100 | 37.5 | 12.5 | 75.0 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 56.8 | 40.9 | 15.9 | 95.5 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 82.5 | 46.0 | 22.2 | 81.0 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 50.0 | 42.9 | 7.1 | 50.0 |
| More than 60 percent | 76.9 | 30.8 | 53.8 | 92.3 |

Source: NACAC: Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

meaning that the institutions consider every fact available to them in making their decisions. Seventy percent of institutions reported that considering demonstrated interest contributes to understanding whether the student will be an appropriate "fit" for the institution. An example of this type of consideration is the hypothetical case of an institution seeking physics majors to strengthen its science department. Individuals who are academically qualified to attend the institution and who show a particular interest in that institution's physics department would be particularly attractive candidates during the admission process.

To a lesser extent, colleges reported that considering demonstrated interest allows them to better assess their yield rates for the coming year (43 percent). Twenty-one percent of institutions stated that considering demonstrated interest allows them to only accept students who are genuinely interested in attending the institution.

Private colleges, highly selective colleges and colleges with low yield rates appear to be most likely to consider a student's interest during the admission process.

Looking beyond the percentages, institutional characteristics had the following correlations with responses to the demonstrated interest questions:

The values of these correlations show that being a private institution or a small institution increases the likelihood that the institution will consider demonstrated interest as a factor in the admission process. The institution's selectivity and the institution's yield rate have a substantially weaker relation to whether the institution considers demonstrated interest.

How do colleges gauge a student's interest in attending?

Colleges use a variety of ways—nearly immeasurable—to determine whether a student is interested in attending the institution. Table 48 outlines six of the most prominent indicators that students provide to college admission officers about the intention to enroll in the institution if accepted.

Essay or Writing Sample

Over the last 11 years, an applicant's writing sample has been increasing in importance as ranked by colleges nationwide. In 1993, only 14 percent of colleges rated a student's writing sample as having considerable importance, growing to 25 percent in 2004.

As shown above in Figure 17, a student's essay or writing sample has become increasingly important in recent years. In fact, the student's essay/writing sample has nearly surpassed a student's rank in class as one of the top four factors in the college admission process. While some attention has been focused on the increasing importance of writing as an academic and life skill, its relevance to the admission process is more likely attributable to the need for college admission officers to make decisions between large numbers of equally qualified candidates in the admission process.

Similar to the consideration of demonstrated interest, an increased reliance on essays or writing samples at the same time that reliance on standardized test scores and grades in college prep courses are reaching all-time highs hints at the need for admission officers to consider some information as part of the admission decision that is not standardized or otherwise impersonal. Since more qualified candidates are headed for four-year colleges with each passing year, efforts to add a "face" to the incoming class may be driving admission officers toward the essay as a quick way to individualize each application.

In 2004, the College Board announced that a revised SAT exam will be implemented starting in spring of 2005 for the graduating high school class of 2006. The exam includes a writing portion

Table 47. Correlation values for demonstrated interest responses and institutional characteristics, 2004.

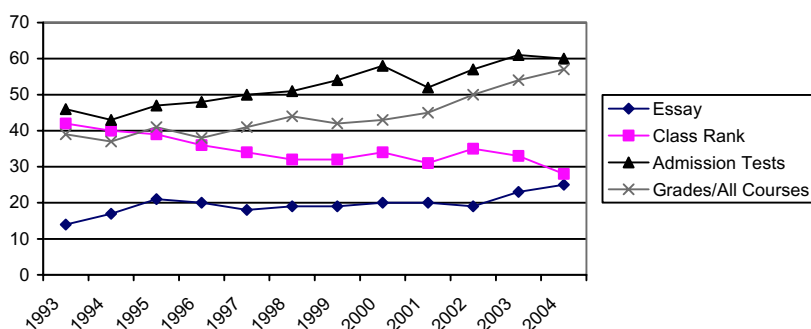
| | Question 1 (direct) | Question 2 (direct example) | Question 3 (factors in admission) |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Control of institution | -.262** | -.366** | .238** |
| Enrollment | .146** | .226** | -.130* |
| Selectivity | .133** | -.004 | -.097* |
| Yield | .119* | .213** | .002 |

* Significant at the .05 level, two-tailed
** Significant at the .01 level, two-tailed
Source: 2004 NACAC Admission Trends Survey

Table 48. Indicators of students' demonstrated interest as perceived by admission officers by institutional characteristics, 2004.

| | Student visited the campus | Student participated in interview | Student frequently contacted the admission office | Student applied early action or early decision | Student had particular academic or professional focus | Student noted contact with faculty members on campus |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Total | 46.9 | 47.8 | 33.6 | 22.6 | 37.2 | 29.2% |
| Control | | | | | | |
| Public | 21.1 | 16.6 | 17.1 | 10.6 | 28.5 | 15.2 |
| Private | 59.7 | 63.7 | 41.9 | 28.7 | 41.6 | 36.3 |
| Type | | | | | | |
| Two-year | 21.1 | 21.1 | 10.5 | 10.8 | 16.2 | 16.2 |
| Four-year | 48.8 | 50.1 | 35.5 | 23.5 | 38.8 | 30.2 |
| Enrollment | | | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 61.2 | 65.6 | 47.1 | 26.8 | 40.6 | 40.5 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 35.4 | 34.0 | 22.9 | 14.6 | 33.3 | 12.5 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 41.2 | 30.0 | 25.5 | 24.0 | 45.1 | 27.5 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 33.3 | 44.4 | 44.4 | 37.5 | 44.4 | 11.1 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 11.1 | 11.1 | 0 | 11.1 | 11.1 | 0 |
| 20,000 or more | 16.7 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 0 | 25.0 | 18.2 |
| Region | | | | | | |
| New England | 58.7 | 60.3 | 47.6 | 27.9 | 45.2 | 32.3 |
| Middle States | 54.5 | 60.2 | 28.6 | 27.5 | 48.5 | 32.7 |
| South | 45.1 | 42.0 | 38.2 | 32.1 | 36.7 | 28.1 |
| Midwest | 40.0 | 39.9 | 32.9 | 13.1 | 30.6 | 27.5 |
| Southwest | 61.1 | 44.4 | 44.4 | 23.5 | 38.9 | 50.0 |
| West | 35.8 | 43.3 | 19.7 | 19.7 | 25.8 | 20.0 |
| Selectivity | | | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 50.0 | 57.8 | 22.7 | 41.5 | 37.9 | 27.3 |
| 50-70 percent | 43.7 | 44.4 | 36.3 | 28.0 | 43.0 | 32.8 |
| 71-85 percent | 54.9 | 55.9 | 41.4 | 18.9 | 35.5 | 32.2 |
| More than 85 percent | 34.7 | 31.3 | 27.1 | 4.3 | 29.2 | 19.1 |
| Yield | | | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 61.9 | 58.3 | 42.7 | 35.8 | 39.8 | 43.3 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 51.3 | 54.1 | 37.0 | 24.4 | 38.0 | 34.8 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 30.9 | 36.3 | 25.9 | 10.3 | 32.5 | 8.9 |
| More than 60 percent | 32.6 | 37.0 | 23.9 | 17.4 | 33.3 | 17.8 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004

Figure 17. Percent of colleges attributing "considerable" importance to factors in the admission process, 1993-2004.

Source: Admission Trends Survey, 1993-2004.

in addition to the more traditional multiple choice sections. According to a survey conducted by the College Board, 74 percent of admissions officers surveyed reported that they would use the new SAT writing score in admissions decisions.²⁴

²⁴ The College Board. (2004, January). *An Important Message for Admissions Officers About the New SAT: 2005*. New York, NY.

Table 49 below provides the range of importance attributed to the writing sample by various types of colleges.

Table 49. Importance of the essay/writing sample as a factor in admission by institutional characteristics, 2004.

| | Considerable Importance | Moderate Importance | Limited Importance | No Importance |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Total | 25.2 | 35.4 | 20.3 | 19.1% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 12.7 | 23.0 | 27.3 | 37.0 |
| Private | 31.7 | 41.5 | 16.9 | 9.8 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 13.5 | 5.4 | 10.8 | 70.3 |
| Four-year | 26.3 | 37.7 | 21.2 | 14.8 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 30.9 | 35.7 | 20.9 | 12.4 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 19.6 | 32.6 | 21.7 | 26.1 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 21.6 | 31.4 | 21.6 | 25.5 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 22.2 | 33.3 | 22.2 | 22.2 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 0.0 | 33.3 | 44.4 | 22.2 |
| 20,000 or more | 8.3 | 25.0 | 41.7 | 25.0 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 32.3 | 44.6 | 18.5 | 4.6 |
| Middle States | 24.2 | 44.4 | 18.2 | 13.1 |
| South | 22.0 | 33.0 | 27.5 | 17.6 |
| Midwest | 17.7 | 29.3 | 23.1 | 29.9 |
| Southwest | 38.9 | 27.8 | 16.7 | 16.7 |
| West | 37.3 | 31.3 | 10.4 | 20.9 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 47.0 | 37.9 | 7.6 | 7.6 |
| 50-70 percent | 18.0 | 43.2 | 21.6 | 17.3 |
| 71-85 percent | 22.4 | 34.9 | 27.0 | 15.8 |
| More than 85 percent | 20.4 | 12.2 | 16.3 | 51.0 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 23.0 | 47.0 | 18.0 | 12.0 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 26.9 | 38.7 | 22.6 | 11.8 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 25.6 | 25.6 | 24.4 | 24.4 |
| More than 60 percent | 26.7 | 15.6 | 17.8 | 40.0 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004

Chapter 5. Homeschooled Students in Admission

CONTENTS



- Number of Homeschooled Students in the United States
- College Applications from Homeschooled Students
- Factors in Admission for Homeschooled Students

Number of Homeschooled Students in the United States

According to an issue brief released by the U.S. Department of Education in July 2004, the number of students participating in homeschool education in 2003 topped 1.1 million, up from 850,000 in 1999.¹ Due to the increase in the number of students participating in homeschool education, colleges and universities are increasingly adopting formal evaluation policies on admission of homeschooled students and the factors in admission for these students.

College Applications from Homeschooled Students

Since 2000, NACAC has polled colleges and universities about two key indicators regarding homeschooled students and the college admission process: (1) whether the number of applications from homeschooled students had increased, and (2) whether colleges and universities have a formal method of evaluating applications from homeschooled students.

Applications from homeschooled students continue to increase. In 2004, 97 percent of colleges reported receiving at least as many applications from homeschooled students as in 2003. Table 50 below shows which types of institutions are most likely to have formal policies for evaluating applications from homeschooled students and how applications from those students changed in 2004.

Owing to the steady increase in homeschooled student applications to college, an increasingly large majority (83 percent) of colleges have developed formal policies for evaluating applications from homeschooled students. (See Table 51)

¹ US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2004, July). *1.1 Million Homeschooled Students in the United States in 2003*. Washington, DC.

Table 50. Percent of institutions with formal policies for evaluating homeschooled students and college estimation of change in applications from homeschooled students by institutional characteristics, 2004.

| | Percent of institutions with formal evaluation policy | Applications increased | Application decreased | Applications stayed the same |
|--|---|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Total | 83% | 45 | 3 | 52% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 88 | 52 | 3 | 46 |
| Private | 80 | 41 | 4 | 55 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 74 | 54 | 11 | 35 |
| Four-year | 84 | 44 | 3 | 53 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 81 | 41 | 3 | 55 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 81 | 51 | 5 | 44 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 75 | 47 | 2 | 51 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 100 | 56 | 0 | 44 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 100 | 33 | 11 | 56 |
| 20,000 or more | 83 | 33 | 0 | 67 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 79 | 41 | 3 | 56 |
| Middle States | 83 | 47 | 3 | 50 |
| South | 89 | 50 | 6 | 45 |
| Midwest | 80 | 45 | 4 | 51 |
| Southwest | 89 | 61 | 0 | 39 |
| West | 82 | 32 | 2 | 66 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 85 | 41 | 3 | 56 |
| 50-70 percent | 84 | 44 | 3 | 53 |
| 71-85 percent | 82 | 42 | 3 | 55 |
| More than 85 percent | 80 | 49 | 4 | 47 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 79 | 41 | 2 | 57 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 81 | 43 | 3 | 55 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 90 | 38 | 2 | 60 |
| More than 60 percent | 83 | 51 | 9 | 40 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 51. Colleges and universities with formal admission policies for homeschooled students, 2000-2004.

| | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|
| College/University has formal evaluation policy | 52 | 44 | 74 | 77 | 83% |
| College/University does not have formal evaluation policy | 48 | 46 | 26 | 23 | 17 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 52. Admission requirements for homeschooled students, 2004.

| Factor | Required | Recommended | Neither |
|---|----------|-------------|---------|
| Standardized admission test (SAT, ACT) | 89.3 | 6.5 | 4.2% |
| Transcript/record of grades | 82.5 | 11.4 | 6.0 |
| Minimum subject/course units | 53.2 | 19.5 | 27.4 |
| Recommendations from persons other than parents | 40.6 | 28.2 | 31.2 |
| Statement describing home school structure and mission | 33.9 | 31.7 | 34.4 |
| GED | 20.7 | 30.1 | 49.2 |
| Writing sample (separate from application for admission) | 29.5 | 22.7 | 47.8 |
| State high school equivalency certificate | 25.7 | 25.7 | 48.6 |
| Statement from the applicant attesting that the applicant completed a home school education in accordance with laws of the applicant's state | 22.1 | 20.7 | 57.1 |
| Statement from the district superintendent (or appropriate public official) attesting that the applicant completed a home school education in accordance with the laws of the applicant's state | 15.6 | 21.7 | 62.7 |
| Completion state proficiency test(s) | 14.9 | 20.1 | 65.0 |
| Standardized subject tests (such as SAT II) | 9.6 | 18.9 | 71.6 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Admission Requirements for Homeschooled Students

What does it mean to say that 83 percent of colleges maintain formal policies for evaluating the applications of homeschooled students? More often than not, colleges now maintain a separate but similar set of written policies that indicate what homeschooled students must submit to the admission office for consideration, and the standards by which admission offices evaluate the information submitted.

As part of the 2004 NACAC Admission Trends Survey, NACAC asked colleges and universities what they required of homeschooled applicants, and what they recommended as information to be submitted to the admission office. As Table 52 shows, between 80 and 90 percent of all colleges require homeschooled students to submit standardized test scores and a transcript or record of grades to describe their educational achievement.

To elaborate on the data in Table 52, Table 53 below provides a comparison of homeschool applicant requirements in the admission process by institutional characteristics. While most information required of homeschooled students is consistently required at all institutions, highly selective and private institutions are more likely to require information to be submitted. In the case of public institutions, many states now have standards for homeschooled students, which are used in admission to public postsecondary institutions in those states.

Table 53. Requirements of homeschooled students in college admission by institutional characteristics, 2004.

| | Standardized admission test (SAT, ACT) | Transcript/record of grades | Minimum subject/course units | Recommendations from persons other than parents |
|--|--|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Total | 89.3 | 82.5 | 53.2 | 40.6% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 82.3 | 72.5 | 54.4 | 13.0 |
| Private | 92.8 | 87.4 | 52.5 | 53.3 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 31.4 | 62.9 | 15.6 | 18.2 |
| Four-year | 93.9 | 84.1 | 56.1 | 42.5 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 88.0 | 84.6 | 48.7 | 50.0 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 88.6 | 81.4 | 56.4 | 47.5 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 90.2 | 80.4 | 55.3 | 33.3 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 66.7 | 77.8 | 66.7 | 12.5 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 88.9 | 66.7 | 55.6 | 0 |
| 20,000 or more | 91.7 | 66.7 | 72.7 | 0 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 85.7 | 77.6 | 51.8 | 70.5 |
| Middle States | 84.4 | 81.1 | 55.1 | 45.1 |
| South | 96.7 | 85.2 | 71.8 | 27.9 |
| Midwest | 92.9 | 87.2 | 50.0 | 29.1 |
| Southwest | 100 | 94.1 | 64.7 | 18.8 |
| West | 78.5 | 71.4 | 28.3 | 52.5 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 90.6 | 85.0 | 53.6 | 60.0 |
| 50-70 percent | 92.6 | 83.6 | 61.3 | 37.2 |
| 71-85 percent | 91.3 | 85.0 | 47.9 | 40.8 |
| More than 85 percent | 68.8 | 69.6 | 37.0 | 31.8 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 92.9 | 88.7 | 57.3 | 50.5 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 92.3 | 80.0 | 51.3 | 46.7 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 86.1 | 84.8 | 57.3 | 29.3 |
| More than 60 percent | 74.4 | 81.4 | 33.3 | 29.3 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 53. Requirements of homeschooled students in college admission by institutional characteristics, 2004. (continued)

| | Statement describing home school structure and mission | Writing sample (separate from application for admission) | State high school equivalency certificate | Statement from the applicant attesting they completed a home school education in accordance with laws of the state |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Total | 33.9 | 29.5 | 25.7 | 22.1% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 24.1 | 12.1 | 22.2 | 18.4 |
| Private | 38.5 | 37.8 | 27.2 | 24.1 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 14.7 | 15.2 | 41.7 | 6.3 |
| Four-year | 35.5 | 30.8 | 24.1 | 23.5 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 37.5 | 33.0 | 28.5 | 22.8 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 32.5 | 39.5 | 23.7 | 28.9 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 30.4 | 19.1 | 32.7 | 20.0 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 33.3 | 44.4 | 44.4 | 44.4 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 22.2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 20,000 or more | 25.0 | 16.7 | 0 | 8.3 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 41.4 | 41.1 | 27.8 | 36.4 |
| Middle States | 49.4 | 29.7 | 39.6 | 32.6 |
| South | 27.1 | 17.9 | 23.8 | 19.8 |
| Midwest | 24.4 | 28.3 | 23.7 | 11.8 |
| Southwest | 23.5 | 35.3 | 18.8 | 35.3 |
| West | 35.6 | 32.8 | 10.2 | 15.5 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 44.1 | 43.9 | 22.8 | 24.1 |
| 50-70 percent | 41.7 | 25.4 | 25.0 | 27.9 |
| 71-85 percent | 30.1 | 33.3 | 29.1 | 19.3 |
| More than 85 percent | 19.6 | 15.6 | 25.6 | 24.4 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 42.6 | 41.8 | 20.8 | 23.2 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 39.0 | 30.5 | 29.9 | 23.1 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 23.0 | 22.2 | 15.3 | 23.0 |
| More than 60 percent | 24.4 | 23.1 | 45.2 | 22.0 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 53. Requirements of homeschooled students in college admission by institutional characteristics, 2004. (continued)

| | GED | Statement from the district superintendent (or similar) attesting that the applicant completed a home school education in accordance with the laws of the applicant's state | Completion state proficiency test(s) | Standardized subject tests (such as SAT II) |
|--|-------------|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| Total | 20.7 | 15.6 | 14.9 | 9.6% |
| Control | | | | |
| Public | 18.7 | 17.1 | 13.6 | 11.6 |
| Private | 21.2 | 14.6 | 15.5 | 8.7 |
| Type | | | | |
| Two-year | 35.3 | 18.2 | 15.6 | 6.1 |
| Four-year | 19.1 | 15.2 | 14.9 | 9.9 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 22.3 | 12.4 | 15.4 | 5.5 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 19.4 | 23.7 | 8.3 | 12.8 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 13.3 | 27.7 | 14.0 | 20.5 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 25.0 | 22.2 | 25.0 | 22.2 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 22.2 | 22.2 | 0 | 11.1 |
| 20,000 or more | 8.3 | 0 | 16.7 | 8.3 |
| Region | | | | |
| New England | 32.1 | 26.8 | 17.0 | 13.2 |
| Middle States | 32.1 | 36.8 | 22.9 | 4.7 |
| South | 11.5 | 12.0 | 17.7 | 14.6 |
| Midwest | 17.7 | 4.0 | 11.2 | 5.6 |
| Southwest | 6.3 | 12.5 | 6.3 | 5.9 |
| West | 14.8 | 3.5 | 2.8 | 14.5 |
| Selectivity | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 17.9 | 16.1 | 14.8 | 33.3 |
| 50-70 percent | 15.3 | 23.2 | 18.6 | 5.0 |
| 71-85 percent | 25.5 | 12.7 | 13.3 | 2.9 |
| More than 85 percent | 18.2 | 7.0 | 16.7 | 4.8 |
| Yield | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 20.2 | 16.5 | 14.4 | 6.4 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 20.4 | 17.5 | 19.4 | 10.0 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 13.7 | 11.1 | 11.3 | 11.4 |
| More than 60 percent | 30.0 | 15.0 | 12.8 | 8.1 |

Chapter 6. School Counselors and College Counseling

CONTENTS



- College Counseling Defined
- High Student-to-Counselor Ratios Persist
- What is the Racial/Ethnic Composition of School Counselors in America?
- Academic and College Preparation Top Priorities of Counselors
- College Counseling Suffers in Public Schools
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College Counseling Defined

In public and private schools nationwide, a variety of professionals work to provide counseling and related services to students. In general, these professionals are called “pupil services personnel.” Among the different categories of pupil services personnel are school counselors. Originally, these professionals were generally referred to as “guidance counselors.” In many schools, this designation remains in tact. However, as specialization has increased in the profession, “counselor” is in many cases no longer sufficient as a stand-alone title, as some professionals provide mental health counseling, others social and family counseling, and still others academic or “pre-college” counseling. Often, these functions are combined into the job description for a single professional.

Because many counseling professionals provide a combination of these services, NACAC developed a “Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor,” to ensure that any counseling professional who provides at least some counseling in the college admission process could build an effective program for counseling students. Precollege counseling generally includes activities that help students (1) pursue the most challenging curriculum that results in enhanced postsecondary

educational options, (2) identify and satisfy attendant requirements for college access, and (3) navigate the maze of financial aid, college choice, and other processes related to college application and admission.

According to NACAC’s statement on precollege counseling,¹ assisting students in reaching their full potential requires the cooperative efforts of school administrators, teachers, community representatives, government officials, parents, and the students themselves, as well as a trained staff of school counselors who are able to facilitate student development and achievement. Of particular importance to student success is access to a strong precollege guidance and counseling program that begins early in the student’s education.

Counselors can be significant assets in the college admission process. Students face additional challenges without a strong counselor to help them, which can only make the college application and admission process more difficult.

¹ National Association for College Admission Counseling. (1990, June). “Statement on Precollege Guidance and the Role of the School Counselor.” Alexandria, VA. www.nacac.com/downloads/policy_precol_guidance.pdf.

High Student-to-Counselor Ratios Persist

On average, each counselor in an American public school is responsible for counseling 478 students. Although this caseload burden has been reduced slightly over the past five years. (See Figure 18) it remains at nearly five times the recommended student-to-counselor ratio for college and academic counseling.

Counseling caseloads in public schools are slightly better, though still more than three times the recommended ratio for college and academic counseling. Each counselor in a public high school is responsible for counseling 315 students.

Where the Counselors Aren't States:

Student-to-counselor ratios vary from state to state. Over the past five years, five states have consistently maintained exceedingly high student to counselor ratios:

- California (951:1)
- Minnesota (797:1)
- Arizona (742:1)
- Utah (715:1)
- Illinois (708:1)

Table 54 includes the student-to-counselor ratio among all schools and among secondary schools for each state.

Figure 18. National Student-to-Counselor Ratio, 1992-2001.

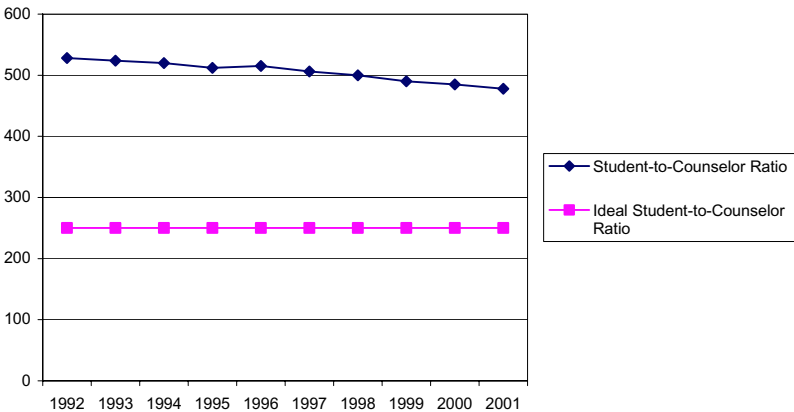


Table 54. Public school student-to-counselor ratio by state, 2003.

| State | Students | Counselors | Students Per Counselor (All Schools) |
|----------------|------------|------------|--------------------------------------|
| U.S. | 48,202,324 | 100,901 | 478 |
| Alabama | 739,678 | 1,696 | 436 |
| Alaska | 134,364 | 289 | 465 |
| Arizona | 937,755 | 1,264 | 742 |
| Arkansas | 450,985 | 1,436 | 314 |
| California | 6,356,348 | 6,684 | 951 |
| Colorado | 751,862 | 1,390 | 541 |
| Connecticut | 570,023 | 1,328 | 429 |
| Delaware | 116,342 | 238 | 489 |
| D.C. | 76,166 | 243 | 313 |
| Florida | 2,539,929 | 5,640 | 450 |
| Georgia | 1,496,012 | 3,319 | 451 |
| Hawaii | 183,829 | 649 | 283 |
| Idaho | 248,515 | 591 | 420 |
| Illinois | 2,084,187 | 2,942 | 708 |
| Indiana | 1,003,875 | 1,812 | 554 |
| Iowa | 482,210 | 1,197 | 403 |
| Kansas | 470,957 | 1,142 | 412 |
| Kentucky | 660,782 | 1,460 | 453 |
| Louisiana | 730,464 | 3,094 | 236 |
| Maine | 204,337 | 646 | 316 |
| Maryland | 866,743 | 2,228 | 389 |
| Massachusetts | 982,989 | 2,924 | 336 |
| Michigan | 1,785,160 | 2,660 | 671 |
| Minnesota | 846,891 | 1,063 | 797 |
| Mississippi | 492,645 | 966 | 510 |
| Missouri | 924,445 | 2,730 | 339 |
| Montana | 149,995 | 432 | 347 |
| Nebraska | 285,402 | 777 | 367 |
| Nevada | 369,498 | 715 | 517 |
| New Hampshire | 207,671 | 772 | 269 |
| New Jersey | 1,367,438 | 3,611 | 379 |
| New Mexico | 320,234 | 775 | 413 |
| New York | 2,888,233 | 7,241 | 399 |
| North Carolina | 1,335,954 | 3,422 | 390 |
| North Dakota | 104,225 | 279 | 374 |
| Ohio | 1,838,285 | 3,587 | 512 |
| Oklahoma | 624,548 | 1,570 | 398 |
| Oregon | 554,071 | 1,172 | 473 |
| Pennsylvania | 1,816,747 | 4,292 | 423 |
| Rhode Island | 159,205 | 351 | 454 |
| South Carolina | 694,584 | 1,717 | 405 |
| South Dakota | 128,039 | 320 | 400 |
| Tennessee | 928,000 | 1,878 | 494 |
| Texas | 4,259,823 | 9,924 | 429 |
| Utah | 489,072 | 684 | 715 |
| Vermont | 99,978 | 418 | 239 |
| Virginia | 1,177,229 | 2,362 | 498 |
| Washington | 1,014,798 | 1,972 | 515 |
| West Virginia | 282,455 | 660 | 428 |
| Wisconsin | 881,231 | 1,948 | 452 |
| Wyoming | 88,116 | 391 | 225 |

Source: Common Core of Data, 2002-03, U.S. Department of Education

Table 55. Average student to counselor ratio by high school type, 2004.

| | Average Number of Students Per Counselor | Standard Error |
|-------------------------------|--|----------------|
| All respondents | 288 | 5.6 |
| Control | | |
| Public schools | 314 | 6.5 |
| Private schools | 241 | 10.1 |
| Private Non-Parochial | 245 | 11.3 |
| Private Parochial | 233 | 19.7 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | |
| 0 to 25% | 309 | 9.3 |
| 26 to 50% | 319 | 11.8 |
| 51 to 100% | 332 | 23.7 |
| Enrollment | | |
| Less than 500 students | 218 | 7.2 |
| 500-999 | 286 | 8.1 |
| 1,000-1,499 | 343 | 19.1 |
| 1,500-1,999 | 326 | 13.8 |
| More than 2,000 students | 379 | 22.2 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

Public Schools: A private school counselor’s caseload is 23 percent less than that of a public school counselor. Counselors in public secondary schools, as evidenced by U.S. Department of Education data and by NACAC survey data, are faced with caseloads of 315 students to each counselor.

Large Schools: High schools with large numbers of students have significantly higher counseling caseloads than smaller schools.

Schools located in Disadvantaged Communities: Schools with a high percentage of students who are eligible to receive free- or reduced-price lunch are the most likely among all types of schools to suffer from high student-to-counselor ratios.

What is the Racial/Ethnic Composition of School Counselors in America?

School counseling in the United States is a relatively homogenous profession. As Table 56 indicates, 83 percent of counselors nationwide are white, non-Hispanic. This is over-representative of the national white non-Hispanic population. According to the Census Bureau, the white population accounts for 69 percent of the U.S. population.²

African Americans make up just six percent of the nation's school counseling corps, while Hispanic Americans constitute four percent. Both are significantly underrepresented compared to the national populations of African and Hispanic Americans.

As Table 56 shows, schools where 50 to 100 percent of students are eligible for free- and reduced price lunch employ nearly four times the number of Hispanic and African American counselors as the national average.

Large schools (those with enrollments of more than 2,000) employ between two and three times more Hispanic and African American counselors than the national average.

Similarly, schools in the South, Middle States, and Southwest employed more minority counselors, including African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans, than the national average.

Table 56. Mean percent of school counselors by race/ethnicity, 2004.

| | Mean percent of Hispanic American counselors | Mean percent of White counselors | Mean percent of African American counselors | Mean percent of Asian American counselors | Mean percent of Native American counselors |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|--|--|---|
| All respondents | 3.8 | 82.6 | 6.3 | 1.5 | .9% |
| Control | | | | | |
| Public schools | 6.3 | 83.8 | 10.6 | 2.0 | 1.4 |
| Private schools | 5.5 | 88.5 | 5.6 | 2.9 | .1 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | | | | |
| 0 to 25% | 3.4 | 89.7 | 5.5 | 2.1 | .4 |
| 26 to 50% | 8.0 | 80.3 | 12.3 | 2.4 | 1.9 |
| 51 to 100% | 14.3 | 65.9 | 23.8 | 2.6 | 5.5 |
| Enrollment | | | | | |
| Less than 500 students | 6.2 | 88.0 | 6.7 | 2.4 | 1.9 |
| 500-999 | 5.5 | 87.0 | 7.9 | .5 | .7 |
| 1,000-1,499 | 3.1 | 87.0 | 9.2 | 1.1 | .3 |
| 1,500-1,999 | 5.3 | 80.1 | 12.8 | 5.9 | .1 |
| More than 2,000 students | 12.1 | 77.6 | 12.1 | 4.3 | .6 |
| Region | | | | | |
| New England | 1.1 | 93.3 | 3.9 | .9 | 0 |
| Middle States | 5.6 | 85.9 | 11.6 | 1.8 | 1.0 |
| South | 2.6 | 83.9 | 15.2 | .2 | 0 |
| Midwest | 2.4 | 90.3 | 5.5 | 1.2 | .3 |
| Southwest | 8.5 | 81.9 | 9.8 | 1.8 | 5.6 |
| West | 13.0 | 76.5 | 4.9 | 7.9 | .5 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

² United States Census Bureau, Geographic Comparison Table GCT-P6. "Race and Hispanic or Latino: 2000."

Academic and College Preparation Top Priorities of Counselors

In the 2003 *High School Guidance Counseling* report, the U.S. Department of Education asked high school counselors to rank order the priorities of their counseling activities in school. The 2004 NACAC Counseling Trends Survey included an identical question, intended to measure the top occupational priority for school counselors.

Similar to the *High School Guidance Counseling* report, the NACAC Counseling Trends Survey found that “helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary education” and “helping students with their academic achievement in high school” are consistently top priorities for counseling departments. “Helping students with personal growth and development” and “helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school” were ranked third and fourth. (See Table 57)

Table 57. Mean counselor goal ranking on scale 1 to 4 by school type, 2004. (1=most important and 4=least important)

| | Help students plan & prepare for postsecondary ed. | Help students w/ their academic achievement in HS | Help students w/personal growth & development | Help students plan & prepare for their work roles after HS |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| All respondents | 1.75 | 1.81 | 2.71 | 3.45 |
| Control | | | | |
| Public schools | 1.91 | 1.69 | 2.80 | 3.26 |
| Private schools | 1.47 | 2.04 | 2.54 | 3.80 |
| <i>Private Non-Parochial</i> | 1.33 | 2.18 | 2.51 | 3.79 |
| <i>Private Parochial</i> | 1.76 | 1.74 | 2.56 | 3.82 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | | | |
| 0 to 25% | 1.90 | 1.72 | 2.74 | 3.44 |
| 26 to 50% | 2.06 | 1.69 | 3.02 | 3.00 |
| 51 to 100% | 1.89 | 1.74 | 2.85 | 3.13 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Fewer than 500 students | 1.60 | 2.04 | 2.70 | 3.43 |
| 500-999 | 1.71 | 1.84 | 2.64 | 3.48 |
| 1,000-1,499 | 1.96 | 1.68 | 2.74 | 3.45 |
| 1,500-1,999 | 1.94 | 1.60 | 2.76 | 3.50 |
| More than 2,000 students | 1.80 | 1.46 | 2.83 | 3.33 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 1.46 | 2.02 | 2.58 | 3.76 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 1.68 | 1.96 | 2.53 | 3.57 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 1.78 | 1.69 | 2.69 | 3.47 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 1.89 | 1.68 | 2.93 | 3.35 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 1.83 | 1.85 | 2.81 | 3.24 |
| More than 500:1 | 1.58 | 1.98 | 2.85 | 3.15 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

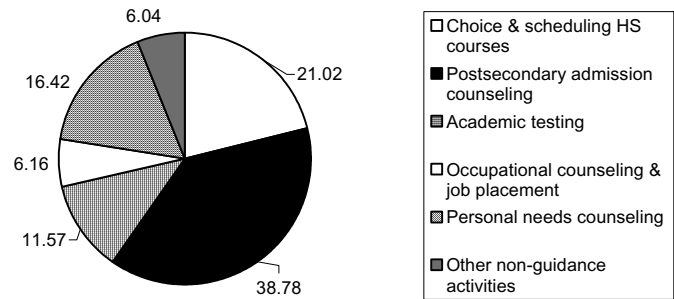
College Counseling Suffers in Public Schools

Counselors in public schools spend only about one half of the time that counselors in private schools spend on college counseling. While counselors on the whole report spending about 39 percent of their time on postsecondary education counseling (See Figure 19), counselors in public schools report spending only 28 percent of their time on postsecondary counseling. Private school counselors report spending 61 percent of their time providing postsecondary education counseling. (See Table 58)

As Table 58 indicates, the challenge is greater at the nation's lowest-income public schools. Counselors in public school settings, particularly low-income settings, are able to provide less than half of the attention to postsecondary preparation than that of their private school peers.

Moreover, the public school disadvantage is further compounded by high student-to-counselor ratios. The result is that the average public school student receives only about one third of the college counseling services as the average private school student.

Figure 19. Percent time counselors spend on task, 2004.



Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

In extreme cases, where high school student-to-counselor ratios surpass 500:1, counselors may have less than one hour per year to devote to college counseling for each student. According to Table 54, students and counselors in states like Washington, South Carolina and Montana may currently operate under these circumstances.

Table 58. Average percent of time spent on task by type of school, 2004.

| Task: | Postsecondary admission counseling | Choice & scheduling HS courses | Personal needs counseling | Academic testing | Occupational counseling & job placement | Other non-guidance activities |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| All respondents | 38.78 | 21.02 | 16.42 | 11.57 | 6.16 | 6.04% |
| Control | | | | | | |
| Public schools | 28.04 | 26.06 | 19.24 | 12.87 | 7.89 | 5.90 |
| Private schools | 60.78 | 10.86 | 10.50 | 8.91 | 2.68 | 6.27 |
| <i>Private Non-Parochial</i> | <i>66.20</i> | <i>9.95</i> | <i>8.09</i> | <i>9.11</i> | <i>2.21</i> | <i>7.93</i> |
| <i>Private Parochial</i> | <i>57.91</i> | <i>12.51</i> | <i>15.68</i> | <i>8.46</i> | <i>3.67</i> | <i>4.31</i> |
| Free and Reduced Price Lunch | | | | | | |
| 0 to 25% | 31.23 | 25.45 | 20.08 | 11.75 | 7.35 | 4.82 |
| 26 to 50% | 26.18 | 25.59 | 18.40 | 14.08 | 8.65 | 8.90 |
| 51 to 100% | 26.32 | 24.49 | 18.60 | 13.49 | 9.73 | 8.09 |
| Enrollment | | | | | | |
| Less than 500 students | 42.87 | 16.36 | 13.31 | 12.51 | 6.31 | 8.64 |
| 500-999 | 42.38 | 19.02 | 16.25 | 10.38 | 6.21 | 5.76 |
| 1,000-1,499 | 34.56 | 24.50 | 17.60 | 12.11 | 6.00 | 5.23 |
| 1,500-1,999 | 31.94 | 26.68 | 20.29 | 10.58 | 6.41 | 4.11 |
| More than 2,000 students | 33.07 | 26.87 | 17.34 | 11.70 | 7.33 | 3.69 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | | | | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 55.15 | 10.78 | 8.93 | 11.56 | 3.70 | 9.89 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 49.54 | 15.38 | 14.73 | 10.43 | 5.11 | 4.80 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 37.96 | 21.41 | 17.33 | 10.52 | 7.22 | 5.56 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 30.17 | 26.50 | 17.45 | 12.63 | 6.41 | 6.84 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 31.74 | 25.43 | 16.51 | 12.82 | 7.47 | 6.03 |
| More than 500:1 | 32.17 | 19.92 | 16.22 | 14.94 | 6.39 | 10.36 |

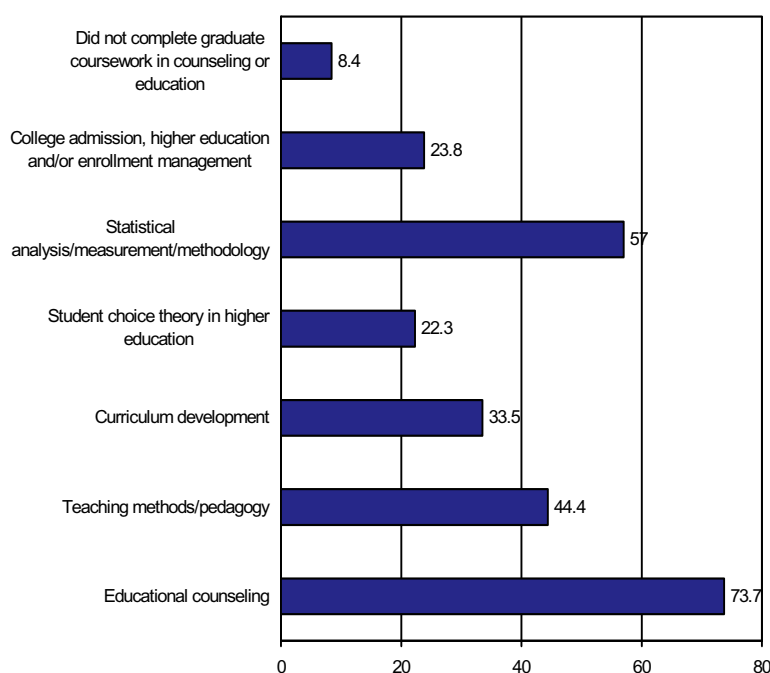
Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

Counselor Professional Development

According to the 2004 NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 92 percent of counselors reported completing graduate coursework of some type, while eight percent reported completing no graduate coursework. As shown in Figure 20, counselors reported completing graduate coursework in the following subject areas.

At the disaggregated level, public school counselors were significantly more likely to have completed graduate coursework than private school counselors, due to certification requirements in nearly all of the 50 states that public school counselors hold a master's degree.³ Public school counselors were at least twice as likely to have completed graduate coursework in "educational counseling" and "statistics/data analysis" as their private school peers. Less than one-quarter of counselors in either public or private setting have completed coursework in college admission or student choice theory.

Figure 20. Percent of counselors completing coursework in select subject areas, 2004.



Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

Time Off for Professional Development

Although nearly all counselors receive time off from their daily school duties to participate in professional development, rural counselors, counselors in medium-sized schools (with 1,000-1,499 students) and counselors with caseloads consisting of more than 400 students appear least likely to receive time off for professional development. (See Table 59)

Table 59. Percent of counselors reporting that schools allow time off for professional development, 2004.

| | Yes | No |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| All respondents | 90 | 10% |
| Control | | |
| Public schools | 87 | 13 |
| All Private schools | 95 | 5 |
| Private Non-Parochial | 95 | 5 |
| Private Parochial schools | 96 | 4 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | |
| 0 to 25% | 89 | 11 |
| 26 to 50% | 86 | 14 |
| 51 to 100% | 86 | 14 |
| Enrollment | | |
| Less than 500 students | 89 | 12 |
| 500-999 | 93 | 8 |
| 1,000-1,499 | 87 | 13 |
| 1,500-1,999 | 92 | 9 |
| More than 2,000 students | 91 | 10 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 98 | 2 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 93 | 8 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 89 | 11 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 87 | 13 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 87 | 14 |
| More than 500:1 | 89 | 11 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

³ Lum, Christie. (2000, March). *A Guide to State Laws and Regulations on Professional School Counseling*, American Counseling Association. Alexandria, VA.

The U.S. Department of Education's 2003 report on high school guidance counseling indicated that in 2002, "about two-thirds (64 percent) of all public high schools indicated that their state or school district provided professional development on academic curriculum standards/frameworks or assessments for guidance counselors during the 12 months preceding the survey."⁴

Cost Coverage for Counselor Professional Development

Counselors at public schools, schools with large student enrollments, and schools with medium student-to-counselor caseloads are far less likely to receive professional development funding than their peers at private, smaller schools. Sixty-seven percent of all counselors must pay at least some portion of their professional development costs out of their own pockets. (See Table 60)

Table 60. Percent of counselors reporting financial support of professional development by school or school district, 2004.

| | All Costs Covered | Most Costs Covered | Some Costs Covered | No Costs Covered |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| All respondents | 33 | 31 | 29 | 8%* |
| Control | | | | |
| Public schools | 21 | 31 | 38 | 10 |
| All Private schools | 53 | 29 | 15 | 4 |
| <i>Private Non-Parochial</i> | 63 | 23 | 10 | 3 |
| <i>Private Parochial schools</i> | 34 | 38 | 23 | 6 |
| Free and Reduced Priced Lunch | | | | |
| 0 to 25% | 23 | 32 | 38 | 7 |
| 26 to 50% | 23 | 28 | 37 | 12 |
| 51 to 100% | 18 | 34 | 39 | 9 |
| Enrollment | | | | |
| Less than 500 students | 42 | 28 | 24 | 7 |
| 500-999 | 37 | 32 | 26 | 5 |
| 1,000-1,499 | 28 | 29 | 29 | 14 |
| 1,500-1,999 | 17 | 33 | 42 | 9 |
| More than 2,000 students | 17 | 33 | 43 | 7 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 49 | 31 | 14 | 6 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 42 | 31 | 22 | 4 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 27 | 36 | 29 | 8 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 24 | 27 | 39 | 11 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 27 | 24 | 37 | 13 |
| More than 500:1 | 38 | 23 | 28 | 11 |

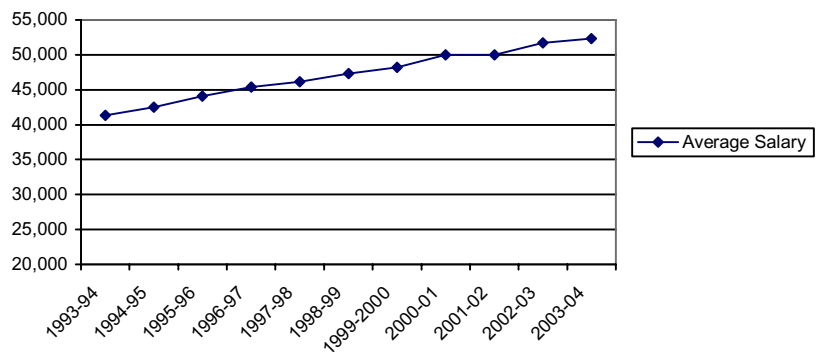
* Percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding
Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

⁴ Parsad, B., Alexander, D., Farris, E., Hudson, L., Greene, B. (2003). *High School Guidance Counseling*. NCES 2003-015. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.

School Counselor Compensation

According to the Educational Resource Service, the mean public school counselor salary has increased steadily for the last ten years. In the 1993–94 school year, the mean salary for a public school counselor was \$41,355. In the 2003–04 school year, the mean public school counselor salary had risen to \$52,303.⁵

Figure 21. Average public school counselor salary, 1993-2004.



⁵ Educational Resource Service. (2004). *Salaries and Wages Paid Professional And Support Personnel in Public Schools, 2003-2004*, National Survey of Salaries and Wages in Public Schools, Arlington, VA.

Source: Educational Resource Service, National Survey of Salaries and Wages in Public Schools 2003-2004.

Chapter 7. The College Admission Office

CONTENTS

- Admission Office Budget and Staff
- Cost to Recruit
- Professional Qualifications for Admission Officers
- Raising Admission Requirements
- Public Image and Marketing
- Ethics and College Admission

Admission Office Budget and Staff

Budget and Staff Trends

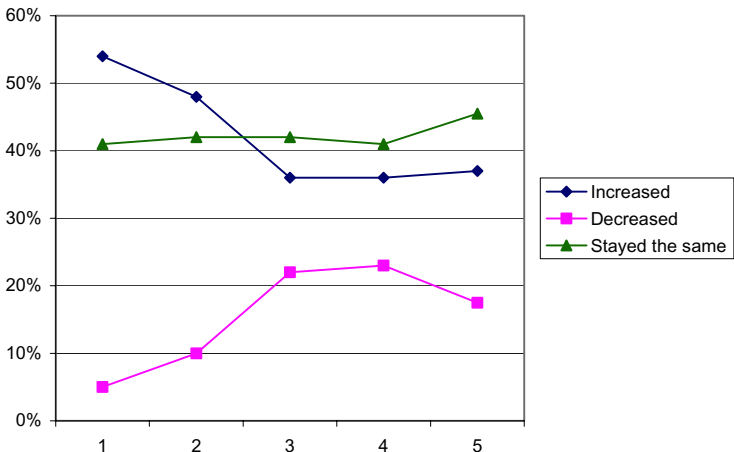
Admission office budget and staff trends in 2004 continued a downward trajectory that has been in progress since at least 2001. In 2000, 54 percent of colleges and universities reported that the budget for their office had increased from the previous year. In 2004, only 37 percent of colleges reported a budget increase. (See Figure 22)

Admission office budgets include funds to cover admission staff salaries, mail and publications for prospective students, Web site

maintenance and enhancements, application printing and processing, and other activities conducted by the office. Admission staff typically includes a dean or vice president for admission or enrollment management, middle-level managers or assistant directors, admission officers, and administrative support.

Colleges and universities report that the number of admission staff has been held steady for the past three years. In 2002, 2003, and 2004, more than 60 percent of colleges and universities reported that the number of admission staff employed has remained the same as the previous year. (See Figure 23)

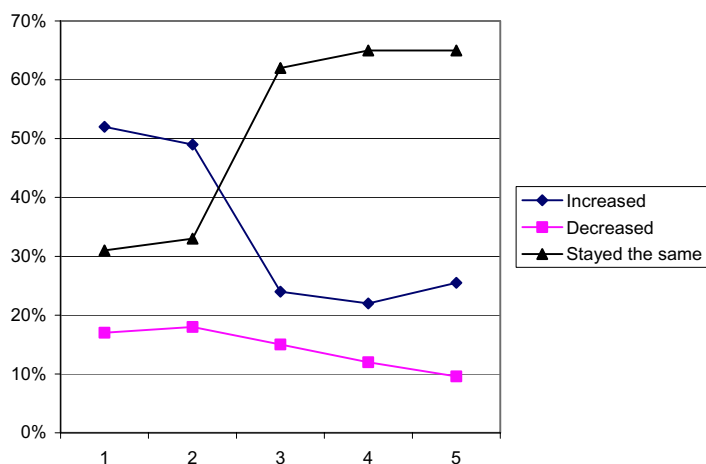
Figure 22. Change in admission office budgets, 2000-2004.



Source: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2000-2004.

Admission Office Budget: Differences Among Institutions

- Colleges and universities whose admission budgets were more likely than others to **increase** in 2004 included private colleges; colleges with 3,000–4,999 students; colleges in the southwest region; less selective colleges; and colleges with lower yield rates.
- Colleges more likely to experience budget decreases included public colleges; two-year colleges; large colleges; and colleges in the south and west regions.

Figure 23. Admission staff change, 2000-2004.

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2000-2004.

Table 61. Estimation of change in college/university admission office budget from 2003-2004.

| | Admission budget increased | Admission budget stayed the same | Admission budget decreased |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Total | 37.0 | 45.5 | 17.5% |
| Control | | | |
| Public | 20.5 | 54.3 | 25.2 |
| Private | 45.0 | 41.4 | 13.6 |
| Type | | | |
| Two-year | 29.4 | 47.1 | 23.5 |
| Four-year | 37.6 | 45.5 | 16.9 |
| Enrollment | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 40.6 | 43.9 | 15.5 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 45.7 | 41.3 | 13.0 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 24.5 | 61.2 | 14.3 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 25.0 | 50.0 | 25.0 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 33.3 | 44.4 | 22.2 |
| 20,000 or more | 18.2 | 45.5 | 36.4 |
| Region | | | |
| New England | 25.9 | 58.6 | 15.5 |
| Middle States | 44.0 | 41.8 | 14.3 |
| South | 43.2 | 36.4 | 20.5 |
| Midwest | 30.1 | 49.7 | 20.3 |
| Southwest | 47.1 | 52.9 | 0 |
| West | 42.6 | 39.3 | 18.0 |
| Selectivity | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 43.3 | 45.0 | 11.7 |
| 50-70 percent | 39.0 | 42.6 | 18.4 |
| 71-85 percent | 34.5 | 47.6 | 17.9 |
| More than 85 percent | 35.6 | 53.3 | 11.1 |
| Yield | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 42.3 | 42.3 | 15.5 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 37.4 | 47.5 | 15.1 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 36.4 | 45.5 | 18.2 |
| More than 60 percent | 27.9 | 48.8 | 23.3 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Admission Office Staff: Differences Between Institutions

Nearly two-thirds of colleges reported continuity in the number of admission staff employed in 2004 as compared to 2003. Twenty-five percent of institutions reported increasing the number of admission staff, while 10 percent reported a decrease in admission staff.

While the largest institutions were least likely to receive a budget increase, they were more likely than average to report an increase in admission staff from 2003 to 2004. (See Table 62)

Table 62. Estimation of change in number of admission office staff from 2003-2004.

| | Admission staff increased | Admission staff stayed the same | Admission staff decreased |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Total All Colleges/Universities | 25.5 | 65.0 | 9.6% |
| Control | | | |
| Public | 24.0 | 64.3 | 11.7 |
| Private | 26.0 | 65.4 | 8.6 |
| Type | | | |
| Two-year | 21.6 | 67.6 | 10.8 |
| Four-year | 25.7 | 64.8 | 9.5 |
| Enrollment | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 26.4 | 63.2 | 10.3 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 21.7 | 76.1 | 2.2 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 18.4 | 79.6 | 2.0 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 37.5 | 50.0 | 12.5 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 33.3 | 44.4 | 22.2 |
| 20,000 or more | 36.4 | 54.5 | 9.1 |
| Region | | | |
| New England | 22.0 | 69.5 | 8.5 |
| Middle States | 26.0 | 65.6 | 8.3 |
| South | 27.3 | 59.1 | 13.6 |
| Midwest | 19.3 | 69.7 | 11.0 |
| Southwest | 52.9 | 47.1 | 0 |
| West | 32.3 | 62.9 | 4.8 |
| Selectivity | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 22.6 | 69.4 | 8.1 |
| 50-70 percent | 21.1 | 69.0 | 9.9 |
| 71-85 percent | 27.2 | 63.9 | 8.8 |
| More than 85 percent | 31.1 | 62.2 | 6.7 |
| Yield | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 24.2 | 69.7 | 6.1 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 23.3 | 67.8 | 8.9 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 30.8 | 61.5 | 7.7 |
| More than 60 percent | 22.7 | 65.9 | 11.4 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004

Admission Office Salaries

The median income for admission staff varies widely based on the position held. A mid-level academic advisor/counselor earns a median salary of \$34,295, which fluctuates very little based on an institution's budget. A mid-level admission representative/high school relations officer earns a median salary of \$30,160, which tends to increase as institutional budget increases.¹ See Table 63 for more detail.

The median salary for a chief admissions officer ranges from \$51,000 to \$86,970 based on institutional budget amount. The chief enrollment manager has the highest median salary at \$92,625.²

Table 63. Median salary of mid-level admission staff by institutional budget quartile, 2003-2004.

| Institution Budget: | Quartile 1 ≤\$25.4 Million | Quartile 2 \$25.4-\$53.1 Million | Quartile 3 \$53.1-\$135.1 Million | Quartile 4 ≥\$135.1 Million | Median Budget, \$53.1 |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Academic Advisor/Counselor | 33,975 | 34,860 | 33,239 | 34,502 | Median Salary: \$34,295 |
| Admissions Rep-HS Relations | 27,418 | 28,902 | 30,750 | 32,911 | 30,160 |

Source: *Mid-Level Administrative and Professional Salary Survey*, College and University Association for Human Resources, 2003-2004, March 2004.

¹ College and University Association for Human Resources. (2004, March) *Mid-Level Administrative and Professional Salary Survey*, 2003-2004. Knoxville, TN.

² College and University Association for Human Resources. (2004, February). *Administrative Compensation Survey*, 2003-2004. Knoxville, TN.

Table 64. Median salary for admission administrators by institutional budget quartile, 2003-2004.

| Institution Budget: | Quartile 1 ≤\$23.6 Million | Quartile 2 \$23.6-\$48.2 Million | Quartile 3 \$48.2-\$119.0 Million | Quartile 4 ≥\$119.0 Million | Median Budget, \$48.2 |
|--|----------------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Chief Admissions Officer | 51,000 | 64,346 | 72,000 | 86,970 | Median Salary: \$70,000 |
| Associate Director Admissions | 37,011 | 42,300 | 47,871 | 56,539 | 47,000 |
| Director, Academic Advising | 47,861 | 47,741 | 56,000 | 67,087 | 53,772 |
| Director, Admissions and Registrar | 52,000 | 58,230 | 67,813 | 90,091 | 62,960 |
| Director, Admissions and Financial Aid | 53,846 | 77,197 | 99,250 | 90,502 | 78,250 |
| Chief Enrollment Manager | 70,788 | 84,127 | 96,900 | 112,937 | 92,625 |

Source: *Administrative Compensation Survey*, College and University Association for Human Resources, 2003-2004 February 2004.

Cost to Recruit

An average college admission office spends \$432 in recruitment and office costs for each student who applies for admission. This dollar amount is calculated by dividing the total admission office budget by the number of students who submitted applications to the college.

Shifting to the pool of students who are offered admission to the institution applicants, the average college admission office expends \$651 per admitted student. This cost is not added to the cost to recruit each applicant. Rather, the calculation is changed (total admission office budget divided by the number of admitted students) so that the admission office's budget is viewed from the perspective of how much money is spent to obtain the pool of students that the college is willing to admit.

Finally, assuming that a college ultimately needs to know how much money it spends per enrolled student (i.e., students who were accepted for admission and elected to attend the institution), the average college spends more than \$1,680 per enrolled student. Again, the cost per enrolled student is not added to the cost per applicant and cost per enrolled student. Rather, it represents the recruitment cost that the institution incurs each year to enroll a single student.

Table 65 provides the average cost to recruit each applicant, admitted student, and enrolled student at various types of institutions. The following differences are prominent:

- Private colleges spend four to five times more than public colleges to recruit applicants, admitted, and enrolled students.
- Small colleges spend four times more than the largest colleges to recruit applicants, admitted and enrolled students
- While the most selective colleges spend substantially less to recruit applicants than less selective colleges, they spend a nearly equal amount per admitted and enrolled student. This reflects an environment where institutional reputation delivers thousands of applications, but where a great deal of effort is spent identifying and recruiting the most “desirable” candidates out of the broad applicant pool.
- Colleges with low yield rates exhibit a similar pattern, albeit for different reasons. Colleges with low yield rates spend less per applicant and admitted student than average, but a great deal more per enrolled student than average. This pattern reflects the focused approach that institutions with low yield rates take to ensure that admitted students attend the institution.

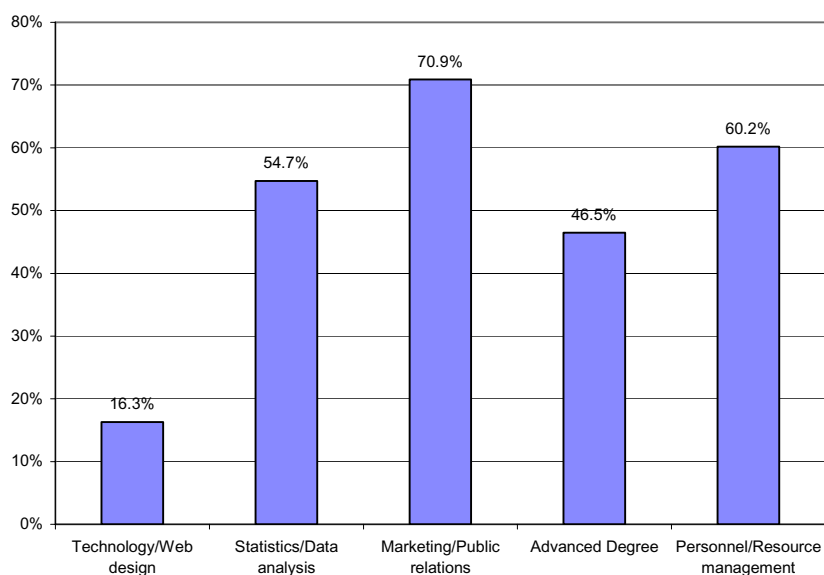
Table 65. Average cost to recruit per applicant, accepted students, and enrolled student, 2004.

| | Average Cost Per Applicant | Average Cost Per Accepted Student | Average Cost Per Enrolled Student |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| All | 432.45 | 650.85 | \$1,683.72 |
| Control | | | |
| Public | 191.02 | 298.64 | 594.03 |
| Private | 538.15 | 804.83 | 2146.33 |
| Type | | | |
| Two-year | 309.18 | 551.90 | 919.39 |
| Four-year | 288.41 | 428.07 | 1283.05 |
| Enrollment | | | |
| < 3,000 | 573.97 | 840.22 | 2159.06 |
| 3000-4999 | 288.41 | 428.07 | 1283.05 |
| 5000-9999 | 261.72 | 434.54 | 1003.74 |
| 10000-14999 | 87.67 | 263.00 | 568.67 |
| 15000-19999 | 170.00 | 268.20 | 714.00 |
| > 20000 | 181.14 | 271.29 | 474.13 |
| Region | | | |
| New England | 361.84 | 603.36 | 1775.40 |
| Middle States | 381.96 | 553.62 | 1613.03 |
| South | 429.90 | 645.79 | 1642.05 |
| Midwest | 506.87 | 746.42 | 1788.06 |
| Southwest | 346.00 | 512.92 | 1245.43 |
| West | 446.80 | 668.46 | 1710.21 |
| Selectivity | | | |
| Less than 50 percent | 281.77 | 706.04 | 1686.23 |
| 50 to 70 percent | 388.58 | 615.37 | 1668.78 |
| 70 to 85 percent | 549.61 | 727.71 | 1894.84 |
| More than 85 percent | 406.46 | 451.91 | 1067.59 |
| Yield Rate | | | |
| Less than 30 percent | 379.61 | 561.68 | 2026.29 |
| 30-45 percent | 484.39 | 709.75 | 1856.92 |
| 46-60 percent | 420.65 | 616.74 | 1171.47 |
| More than 60 percent | 460.83 | 777.11 | 1041.73 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Colleges include a range of costs when calculating the total admission budget, which the cost to recruit is based on. Ninety-eight percent of colleges included expenses for participation in college fairs and other recruitment events, and 98 percent included staff travel expenses for recruitment. Additionally, 90 percent included publications expenses, 79 percent included payments made to third party contractors for admission or recruitment services, and 72 percent included staff salaries in the total admission budget. College admission officers were also given the option to describe additional costs, which included advertising and marketing, supplies, postage, and general operating expenses. (See Appendix to Chapter 7 for more information)

Figure 24. Professional qualifications important for admission officers, 2004.



Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Professional Qualifications for College Admission Officers

In what has been characterized as a “veiled realm,” college admission officers conduct an annual set of rituals that involves attracting students to apply to the institution, evaluating applications, and attempting to enroll students who have received offers of admission. The admission process, though different at each school, has attained a level of standardization that enables admission officers to move between institutions and apply similar practices wherever they go.

- Colleges and universities reported that the most important qualification for prospective admission officers is a background in or aptitude for **marketing and public relations**.
- The second most important qualification for admission officers to possess is knowledge of **personnel/resource management** and **statistics/data analysis**.
- Nearly half of colleges and universities consider an **advanced degree** as a very important qualification for admission officers.

Table 66. Valuation of professional qualifications by institutional enrollment, 2004.

| | Marketing/Public Relations Very Important | Advanced Degree Very Important | Personnel/Resource Management Very Important |
|---------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| All | 70.9 | 46.5 | 60.2% |
| Fewer than 3,000 students | 73.4 | 36.6 | 62.5 |
| 3,000 to 4,999 | 72.7 | 52.3 | 52.3 |
| 5,000 to 9,999 | 71.1 | 56.8 | 62.8 |
| 10,000 to 14,999 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 62.5 |
| 15,000 to 19,999 | 55.6 | 55.6 | 77.8 |
| More than 20,000 students | 55.6 | 88.9 | 77.8 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Notable differences among colleges

- Private colleges assigned a higher value than public colleges to statistics/data analysis (57 percent “very important” to 51 percent “very important”), marketing/public relations (75 percent to 63 percent “very important”), and personnel/resource management (62 percent to 58 percent “very important”). Public colleges placed a higher value on having an advanced degree (62 percent “very important”) than private colleges (39 percent “very important”), and technology/Web design (23 percent “very important” to 13 percent “very important”).
- Four-year colleges placed a higher level of emphasis on all qualifications than two-year colleges. The factors most highly rated by two-year colleges include marketing/public relations (51 percent “very important”), advanced degree (46 percent “very important”) and personnel/resource management (42 percent “very important”).
- The importance of several professional qualifications appears to vary by institutional enrollment. See Table 66 below)
- The marketing/public relations qualification is more important at institutions with the lowest yield rates (77 percent “very important”) than at institutions with the highest yield rates (70 percent “very important”).

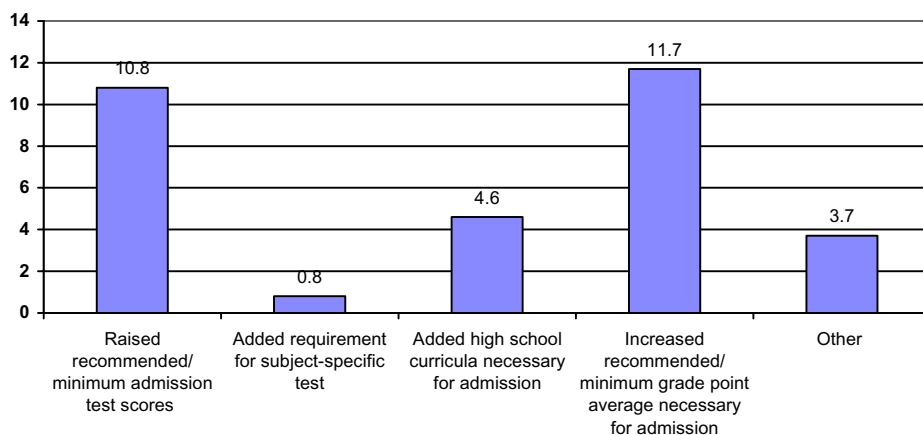
Raising Admission Standards

A small percentage of colleges reported raising the minimum standards for their institutions admission criteria in the past year. The largest percent (12 percent) reported increasing the recommended or minimum grade point average. Eleven percent of institutions reported increasing the recommended or minimum admission test scores.

From the four percent of institutions that reported an increased in “other” requirement for admission, the majority added writing sample or essay requirement. A few institutions cited the adding the new SAT with essay as an admission requirement.

Table 67 provides an overview of the percent of colleges that made revisions to their admission standards in 2004. Institutions that were most likely to raise the requirements for admission were public colleges, institutions with mid-sized enrollments (10,000 to 19,999 students enrolled), and colleges with high selectivity and low yield rates.

Figure 25. Percent of institutions raising admission standards, 2004.



Source: Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 67. Percent of institutions that revised admission standards by institutional characteristics, 2004.

| | Raised recommended/minimum admission test scores | Added requirement for subject-specific test | Added high school curricula necessary for admission | Increased recommended/minimum grade point average for admission | Other change in admission requirement |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| Total | 10.8 | .8 | 4.6 | 11.7 | 3.7% |
| Control | | | | | |
| Public | 11.8 | 1.4 | 8.1 | 13.6 | 4.5 |
| Private | 10.3 | .5 | 2.8 | 10.8 | 3.1 |
| Enrollment | | | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 8.3 | .3 | 2.2 | 9.6 | 3.7 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 15.9 | 0 | 4.8 | 15.9 | 4.8 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 11.5 | 1.6 | 3.3 | 13.1 | 6.6 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 30.0 | 0 | 0 | 40.0 | 10.0 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 33.3 | 0 | 22.2 | 33.3 | 0 |
| 20,000 or more | 7.7 | 0 | 7.7 | 7.7 | 15.4 |
| Selectivity | | | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 14.7 | 1.3 | 2.7 | 14.7 | 5.3 |
| 50-70 percent | 17.8 | .7 | 4.1 | 15.8 | 4.8 |
| 71-85 percent | 11.0 | .6 | 4.3 | 15.3 | 4.9 |
| More than 85 percent | 8.0 | 0 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 6.0 |
| Yield | | | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 13.0 | 0 | 3.7 | 14.8 | 4.6 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 13.1 | 0 | 4.0 | 14.1 | 3.5 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 11.9 | 1.2 | 9.5 | 14.3 | 6.0 |
| More than 60 percent | 17.6 | 3.9 | 2.0 | 17.6 | 7.8 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Ethics in Admission Practice

NACAC was founded 66 years ago to serve as a buffer between unbridled, and at times unethical, competition among colleges and students seeking admission. As an indicator of how admission professionals view their own profession, NACAC's Admission Trends Survey asked whether admission practices at colleges and universities were more or less ethically sound. As Table 68 shows, admission officers are slightly more likely to view admission practices as "less ethically sound" than "more ethically sound," but the majority (67 percent) perceives that the level of ethics in admission practice remains constant.

Table 68. Admission officer assessment of ethics in admission practice, 2002-04.

| | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| More ethically sound | 7% | 8% | 11% |
| About the same level of ethics | 67 | 67 | 65 |
| Less ethically sound | 26 | 24 | 24 |

Source: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2002-2004.

Chapter 8. Paying for College and Financial Aid

CONTENTS

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

- Need-Based Financial Aid and Access to College
- How High Schools Deliver Financial Aid Information
- How Admission Offices Deliver Financial Aid Information

Any discussion of college access must, of necessity, include the topic of financial aid. As will be detailed below, the increasing need for financial aid has created a separate and distinct application process that students a majority of students must navigate if they hope to attend college.

As such, delivering information about how to navigate the financial aid process is a crucial responsibility that most often falls to high school counselors and college admission or financial aid officers.

Need-Based Financial Aid and Access to College

In the academic year 1999–2000, 55 percent of undergraduate students received financial aid of some form to attend college, with an average disbursement of \$6,265 per student. Thirty-nine percent of students received aid from federal sources, such as the Pell Grant, subsidized student loans, Veteran’s grants, and work-study.¹

The average comprehensive tuition rate for public (\$11,210) and private colleges (\$21,915) are significantly higher than the mean federal grant disbursed per student of \$2,719.² On average, the institutions with the highest tuition are private institutions with small enrollments, institutions that are highly selective, and those that have low yield rates. Private colleges and colleges with low enrollments also have a slightly larger percent of students receiving federal grant aid than public schools and those with high enrollments. (See Table 69)

¹ U.S. Department of Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, (2001, July). *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: Student Financial Aid Estimates for 1999 to 2000*, NCES 2001-209. Washington, DC.

² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Peer Analysis System. (2001). Washington, DC.

Table 69. Mean cost of tuition, percent of students receiving federal grant money, and mean disbursement amount of grant money per student receiving aid.

| | Mean Comprehensive Tuition* | Percent Students Receiving Federal Grant Aid | Mean Federal Grant Disbursement amount Per Student Receiving Aid |
|--|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Total | \$18,277.01 | 34.97% | \$2,719.09 |
| Control | | | |
| Public | 11,210.50 | 33.41 | 2,490.35 |
| Private | 21,915.79 | 35.71 | 2,831.29 |
| Enrollment | | | |
| Less than 3,000 students | 19,612.12 | 37.95 | 2,700.00 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 18,077.53 | 33.01 | 2,745.12 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 15,724.94 | 31.09 | 2,688.44 |
| 10,000-14,999 | 16,530.91 | 27.63 | 2,885.14 |
| 15,000-19,999 | 14,852.45 | 23.51 | 2,803.32 |
| 20,000 or more | 13,758.55 | 21.81 | 2,765.10 |
| Selectivity | | | |
| Accept less than 50 percent of applicants | 22,588.07 | 30.27 | 3,221.88 |
| 50-70 percent | 17,544.46 | 33.08 | 2,659.17 |
| 71-85 percent | 19,119.90 | 31.36 | 2,715.41 |
| More than 85 percent | 16,664.68 | 34.56 | 2,538.31 |
| Yield | | | |
| Enroll less than 30 percent of admitted students | 23,589.14 | 28.61 | 2,937.25 |
| 30 to 45 percent | 19,675.36 | 29.65 | 2,842.60 |
| 46 to 60 percent | 15,500.28 | 33.11 | 2,597.44 |
| More than 60 percent | 14,598.02 | 41.10 | 2,435.91 |

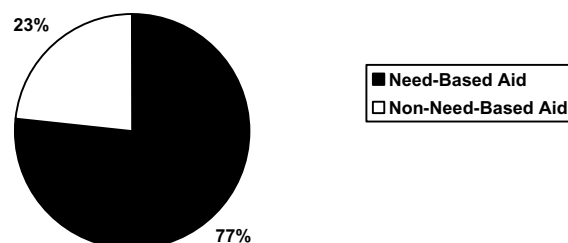
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS Peer Analysis System: includes four-year, non-profit, Title IV eligible colleges only.

* Tuition includes admission, fees, books and supplies, and room and board.

** Tuition and financial information from 2000-2001

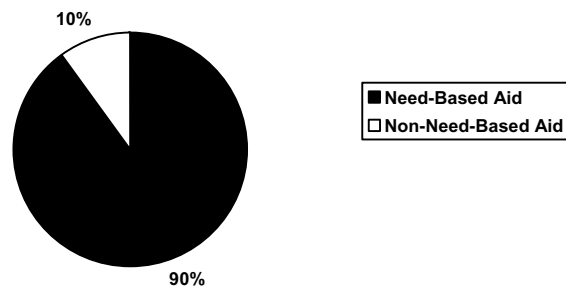
***Control, enrollment brackets, selectivity, and yield from 2001-2002

Need-based aid is provided to students based on their level of income and their need for financial assistance. Non-need-based state aid, including merit aid, has continued to grow over the last 10 years. Non-need-based aid is awarded to students based on factors not pertaining to income, such as high academic achievement. Currently, 77 percent of state financial aid is distributed through need-based aid, and 23 percent through non-need-based aid. (See Figure 26)

Figure 26. Need-based and non-need based state grant aid as a share of total financial aid, 2002-03.

Source: NASSGAP, 34th Annual Survey Report on State-Sponsored Student Financial Aid, 2002—2003.

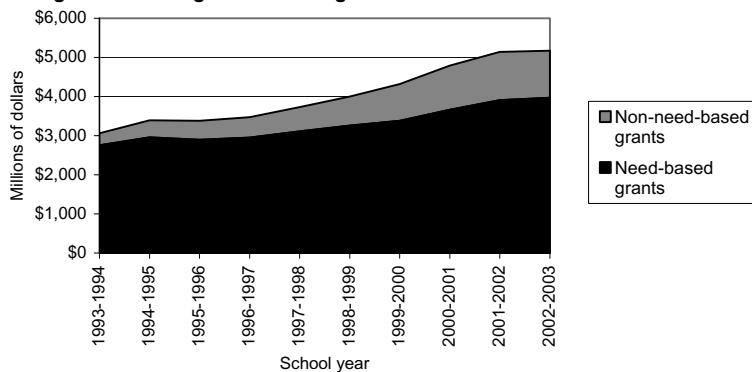
Figure 27. Need-based and non-need-based state grant aid as a share of total financial aid, 1993-94.



Source: NASSGAP, 34th Annual Survey Report on State-Sponsored Student Financial Aid, 2002—2003.

However, dependence on federal need-based aid is likely to grow as the result of a marked increase in non-need-based aid at the state level. In the 1993–94 academic year, non-need-based state grant aid in the United States totaled \$304 million. By 2002-03 academic year, that increased to more than \$1.2 billion dollars, an increase of 229 percent. In comparison, need-based state grant aid has increased by 44 percent over the last 10 years.³ (See Figure 28)

Figure 28. Undergraduate state grant aid in constant 2002 dollars.



Source: NASSGAP, 34th Annual Survey Report on State-Sponsored Student Financial Aid, 2002—2003.

³ National Association for State and Student Grant and Aid Programs. (Winter, 2003-04). *34th Annual Survey Report on State-Sponsored Student Financial Aid, 2002–2003 Academic Year*, Washington, DC.

How High Schools Deliver Financial Aid Information

School Counselors Bear Heavy Responsibility

According to the 2004 NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 77 percent of high schools consider themselves the primary source of information about paying for college for their students. This statistic was similar for both public and private schools.

Of the 77 percent of schools that consider themselves the primary conduit for information about paying for college, 95 percent reported that counselors are the staff members primarily responsible for conveying the information directly to students.

More than half of the 23 percent of high schools that were not the primary providers of information about paying for college noted that college and university admission and financial aid offices were responsible for providing this information to students.

When is Financial Aid Information Conveyed?

About 50 percent of schools first provide financial aid information to students during their junior year (eleventh grade) of high school. About 28 percent first provide financial aid information to students during their freshman (ninth grade) year. As Table 70 shows, public schools, schools with high enrollment, and low-income schools are slightly more likely to distribute financial aid during the first year in high school, whereas private schools, small schools, and schools with a higher-income student body tend to favor the junior year.

Table 70. High school year when financial aid information is *first* presented to high school students, 2004.

| | Ninth Grade | Tenth Grade | Eleventh Grade | Twelfth Grade | Do not provide |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| All respondents | 27.4 | 13.2 | 50.7 | 7.6 | 1.1% |
| Control | | | | | |
| Public schools | 31.4 | 12.2 | 47.2 | 8.7 | 0.5 |
| Private schools | 20.9 | 14.8 | 56.7 | 5.5 | 2.0 |
| <i>Private Non-Parochial</i> | 19.2 | 15.1 | 58.0 | 5.0 | 2.7 |
| <i>Private Parochial</i> | 24.0 | 14.4 | 54.4 | 6.4 | .8 |
| Free and Reduced Price Lunch | | | | | |
| 0 to 25% | 27.7 | 13.4 | 50.9 | 6.3 | 1.7 |
| 26 to 50% | 40.0 | 10.9 | 39.1 | 10.0 | 0.0 |
| 51 to 100% | 35.0 | 15.0 | 42.5 | 7.5 | 0.0 |
| Enrollment | | | | | |
| Less than 500 students | 25.6 | 12.0 | 52.3 | 8.8 | 1.3 |
| 500-999 | 21.0 | 16.2 | 53.7 | 7.4 | 1.8 |
| 1,000-1,499 | 27.7 | 14.5 | 49.4 | 7.8 | 0.6 |
| 1,500-1,999 | 30.6 | 11.6 | 51.2 | 5.8 | 0.8 |
| More than 2,000 students | 52.4 | 8.3 | 33.3 | 6.0 | 0.0 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | | | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 20.8 | 16.7 | 58.3 | 4.2 | 0.0 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 18.5 | 14.5 | 57.3 | 7.7 | 2.0 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 25.9 | 15.0 | 50.5 | 7.6 | 1.0 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 34.2 | 12.1 | 43.7 | 8.9 | 1.1 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 39.2 | 12.4 | 42.3 | 6.2 | 0.0 |
| More than 500:1 | 46.2 | 3.8 | 44.2 | 3.8 | 1.9 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 70. High school year when financial aid information is *first* presented to high school students, 2004.

| | Ninth Grade | Tenth Grade | Eleventh Grade | Twelfth Grade | Do not provide |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| All respondents | 27.4 | 13.2 | 50.7 | 7.6 | 1.1% |
| Control | | | | | |
| Public schools | 31.4 | 12.2 | 47.2 | 8.7 | 0.5 |
| Private schools | 20.9 | 14.8 | 56.7 | 5.5 | 2.0 |
| <i>Private Non-Parochial</i> | 19.2 | 15.1 | 58.0 | 5.0 | 2.7 |
| <i>Private Parochial</i> | 24.0 | 14.4 | 54.4 | 6.4 | .8 |
| Free and Reduced Price Lunch | | | | | |
| 0 to 25% | 27.7 | 13.4 | 50.9 | 6.3 | 1.7 |
| 26 to 50% | 40.0 | 10.9 | 39.1 | 10.0 | 0.0 |
| 51 to 100% | 35.0 | 15.0 | 42.5 | 7.5 | 0.0 |
| Enrollment | | | | | |
| Less than 500 students | 25.6 | 12.0 | 52.3 | 8.8 | 1.3 |
| 500-999 | 21.0 | 16.2 | 53.7 | 7.4 | 1.8 |
| 1,000-1,499 | 27.7 | 14.5 | 49.4 | 7.8 | 0.6 |
| 1,500-1,999 | 30.6 | 11.6 | 51.2 | 5.8 | 0.8 |
| More than 2,000 students | 52.4 | 8.3 | 33.3 | 6.0 | 0.0 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | | | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 20.8 | 16.7 | 58.3 | 4.2 | 0.0 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 18.5 | 14.5 | 57.3 | 7.7 | 2.0 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 25.9 | 15.0 | 50.5 | 7.6 | 1.0 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 34.2 | 12.1 | 43.7 | 8.9 | 1.1 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 39.2 | 12.4 | 42.3 | 6.2 | 0.0 |
| More than 500:1 | 46.2 | 3.8 | 44.2 | 3.8 | 1.9 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

Table 71. Year(s) during which parents seek information about paying for college, 2004.

| | Pre-High School | Ninth/Tenth Grade | Eleventh Grade | Twelfth Grade | After acceptance to college |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| All respondents | 8.2 | 7.1 | 44.8 | 36.8 | 3.0% |
| Control | | | | | |
| Public schools | 5.8 | 5.5 | 42.7 | 42.5 | 3.5 |
| Private schools | 12.0 | 9.6 | 49.1 | 26.9 | 2.3 |
| <i>Private Non-Parochial</i> | 13.4 | 11.5 | 46.5 | 27.2 | 1.4 |
| <i>Private Parochial</i> | 9.6 | 6.4 | 53.6 | 26.4 | 4.0 |
| Free and Reduced Price Lunch | | | | | |
| 0 to 25% | 11.1 | 9.4 | 46.1 | 31.4 | 2.1 |
| 26 to 50% | 2.7 | 6.4 | 33.6 | 54.5 | 2.7 |
| 51 to 100% | 0.0 | 2.5 | 35.0 | 52.5 | 10.0 |
| Enrollment | | | | | |
| Less than 500 students | 7.5 | 8.1 | 43.8 | 36.7 | 3.9 |
| 500-999 | 8.9 | 7.4 | 42.8 | 36.8 | 4.1 |
| 1,000-1,499 | 9.0 | 4.8 | 44.0 | 39.8 | 2.4 |
| 1,500-1,999 | 6.0 | 9.4 | 53.0 | 29.9 | 1.7 |
| More than 2,000 students | 9.6 | 3.6 | 45.8 | 41.0 | 0.0 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | | | | | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 4.1 | 10.2 | 36.7 | 44.9 | 4.1 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 11.8 | 9.0 | 49.8 | 26.9 | 2.4 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 7.0 | 6.4 | 44.0 | 38.6 | 4.0 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 6.4 | 4.8 | 40.4 | 47.3 | 1.1 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 6.2 | 7.2 | 48.5 | 35.1 | 3.1 |
| More than 500:1 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 41.2 | 33.3 | 5.9 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

When Do Families Begin Their Financial Aid Search?

As Table 71 shows, in counselors' estimates, most families do not get serious about searching for financial aid until at least the student's junior year of high school. For public schools in low-income settings, more than half of parents do not seek information about paying for college until at least the student's senior year. A small but significant percentage of those parents wait until after a student has been accepted for admission to a college or university to inquire about financial aid.

Based on data such as these, schools (as evidenced in Table 70)—particularly public schools—are moving to provide financial aid awareness at a much earlier point. However, changing parent expectations about college is likely to take time and substantial effort, particularly on the part of school counselors. As mentioned above, 95 percent of schools that provide financial aid information to students rely on their counseling staff to convey this information to students and parents.

Parents in higher income settings seek information earlier during their students' high school (or pre-high school years) about financial

aid than do parents from low-income settings. Furthermore, 85 percent of counselors from the lowest-income schools⁴ reported that parents were either "not knowledgeable" or "slightly less knowledgeable than average" about financial aid. In the highest-income settings,⁵ 74 percent of counselors reported that parents were "slightly more knowledgeable than average" or "very knowledgeable" about financial aid.

Counselors, who are the "front-line" troops in the effort to disseminate information about financial aid, believe that lack of knowledge about financial aid prevents students and families from even considering college as an option.

⁴ Defined as enrolling between 50 to 100 percent of students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch.

⁵ Defined as enrolling between zero and 25 percent of students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch.

This belief is particularly widespread in public high schools and high schools that enroll large numbers of low-income students. This statistic is particularly important when viewed in the context of the declining share of total grant aid that is delivered in the form of need-based aid. If aid to the neediest students is being reduced relative to aid granted to students not based on need, the likelihood that low-income students will enroll in greater numbers is slim.

Because high school administrators, students and families overwhelmingly rely on counselors as a primary source of information about financial aid, it is crucial that counselors are educated and trained in a manner that allows them to convey timely, accurate information to a wide range of students if more students are to gain access to postsecondary education.

Table 72. Percent of counselors who believe students and parents are discouraged from considering college as an option due to lack of knowledge about financial aid, 2004.

| | Yes |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| All respondents | 43.9% |
| Control | |
| Public schools | 57.8 |
| Private schools | 18.2 |
| <i>Private Non-parochial</i> | 12.6 |
| <i>Private parochial</i> | 27.8 |
| Free and Reduced Price Lunch | |
| 0 to 25% | 34.8 |
| 26 to 50% | 70.4 |
| 51 to 100% | 70.9 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | |
| Fewer than 100:1 | 20.0 |
| 101:1 to 200:1 | 28.3 |
| 201:1 to 300:1 | 43.4 |
| 301:1 to 400:1 | 61.8 |
| 401:1 to 500:1 | 60.0 |
| More than 500:1 | 46.0 |

Source: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2004.

How College Admission Offices Deliver Financial Aid Information

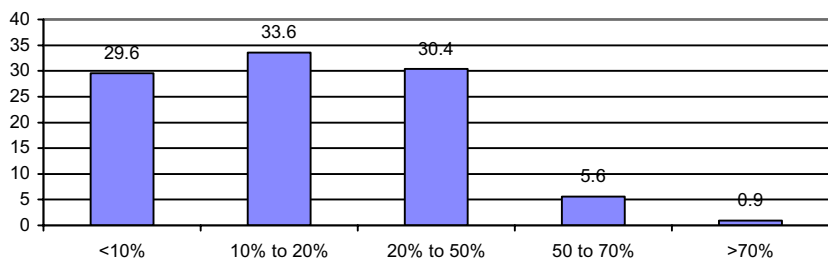
Admission officers are providers of financial aid information to students and families. As the 2004 NACAC Counseling Trends Survey revealed, approximately 15 percent of high schools rely on college admission and financial aid officers to educate students and families about how to pay for college. According to the NACAC 2004 Admission Trends Survey, 50 percent of college admission officers report that parents expect them to answer questions on paying for college. Overall, the majority of college admission officers (55 percent) report feeling confident and prepared to answer college finance questions.

Moreover, college admission officers report spending a substantial amount of time educating students and families about financial aid. (See Figure 29)

Admission officers at public institutions spend less time than average educating students and families about paying for college. Forty-four percent of public college admission officers reported spending less than 10 percent of their time on this task. However, private college admission officers spend a far greater amount of time educating students on paying for college. Thirty-six percent of private college admission officers spend between 20 and 50 percent of their time educating students and families about paying for college. The majority of admission officers (70 percent) are satisfied with the amount of time they can spend on educating students and families on paying for college.

Despite the amount of time spent on educating families on paying for college information and the satisfaction college admission officers have with their time spent, an overwhelming number (90 percent) believe that a lack of knowledge about financial aid prevents some families from even considering college as an option. Additionally, 98 percent of admission officers report that this lack of knowledge limits the types of institutions of higher education that families consider an option.

Figure 29. Amount of time spent by admission officers educating students and families about paying for college, 2004.



Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2004.

Appendix to Chapter 7 Related to the Cost to Recruit

The 2003 Admission Trends Survey was the first to ask college admission offices to estimate the cost to recruit a freshman student. Respondents were provided with brackets: less than \$100; \$100 to \$500; \$501 to 1,000; \$1001 to \$1,500; and more than \$1,500. Responses to the question appeared to conform to logical patterns, as institutional expenditures varied in the expected ways (i.e., private spent more than public, small institutions spent more than large). However, the question yielded little insight into how admission offices estimated the cost to recruit.

The 2004 Admission Trends Survey was modified in two ways to provide more detailed information about the cost to recruit students. First, the survey included two options for colleges to respond to the “cost to recruit” question. The following question wording was used to ensure that we obtained maximum response to the question:

“In an effort to more accurately measure the “cost to recruit” students for postsecondary education the association seeks your assistance in answering ONE of the following questions (“A” or “B”).

A. Please estimate the average cost to recruit each of the following to your institution for Fall 2004:

- 1) average cost per applicants (total admission budget divided by number of applicants)
- 2) average cost per accepted student (total admission budget divide by number of accepted students)
- 3) average cost per enrolled student (total admission budget divided by number of enrolled students)

B. Please provide the “total admission budget” dollar amount, from which we will determine

the average costs based on your responses to questions 5a, 5b, and 5c [5a, 5b, and 5c were number of applications received, number first-year, degree-seeking students admitted, and number of first-year, degree-seeking students who enrolled].”

Nearly five out of every six respondents chose to answer part B, allowing for a generalized analysis of the cost to recruit applicants, admitted students, and enrolled students using the “total admission budget” as the numerator. The numbers of applicants, admitted students, and enrolled students were provided by institutions in response to questions posed earlier on the survey.

Second, respondents were asked the following question to help us more accurately define the “total admission budget” and, by extension, the cost to recruit:

“Which of the following were included in the calculation of your institution’s “total admission budget?” (Check all that apply)

1. Admission staff salaries, which 72 percent of respondents included.
2. Admission staff benefits, (48 percent)
3. Staff travel expenses for recruitment, (98 percent)
4. Expenses for participation in college fairs and other recruitment events, (98 percent)
5. Publications expenses, (90 percent)
6. Payments made to third party contractors for admission or recruitment services, (79 percent)
7. Institutional financial aid (scholarships, tuition discounting provided to students by institutions—NOT federal or state financial aid), (six percent)
8. Other, (25 percent)

Counseling and College Counseling In America's High Schools



Patricia M. McDonough

Professor

Department of Education

University of California, Los Angeles

310/206-2120

mcdonough@gseis.ucla.edu

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This report was commissioned by the National Association for College Admission Counseling as part of an ongoing effort to inform the association and the public about the state of college counseling in America's high schools.

The views and opinions expressed in this report are solely those of the author and not necessarily those of NACAC.

Research clearly shows that counselors, when consistently and frequently available and allowed to provide direct services to students and parents, can be a highly effective group of professionals who positively impact students' aspirations, achievements, and financial aid knowledge.

Introduction

Examining high school counselors and the role they play in the college access process could not be a more timely or vital action to undertake. Within schools, no professional is more important to improving college enrollments than counselors. Research clearly shows that counselors, when consistently and frequently available and allowed to provide direct services to students and parents, can be a highly effective group of professionals who positively impact students' aspirations, achievements, and financial aid knowledge (Adelman, 1999; McDonough, 1997 and 2004; Orfield and Paul; 1993; Plank and Jordan, 2001). However, as this paper will show, counselors are structurally constrained from doing the job they know and do best, which is providing: information to help nurture and sustain aspirations, guidance on course selection for maximal academic preparation, motivation to achieve, and advice on how to investigate and choose a college.

Currently the general state of counseling is not an important point on any major policy agenda. However, college access is an important educational and economic policy issue, a lynchpin in P-16 reforms, an imperative for advocates for improving affordability, and essential to policymakers wishing to reduce barriers to college admission. This vital issue is marked by both progress and unmet goals and what follows is a summary of these major college access issues

Generations of working-class, immigrant and underrepresented minority students have improved their individual economic circumstances through a college education, while policymakers and employers have stimulated economic growth and created an informed citizenry through more college-educated adults. Although we have 16.5 million undergraduates today (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), economic and manpower projections are that the U.S. will face a shortage of 14 million college-educated workers by 2020 if current demographic and economic trends continue as expected (Carnevale, 2002). Specifically, six out of every 10 jobs in our economy depend on highly trained workers with the requisite advanced skills that are available only to those possessing either a two-year or four-college degree (Carnevale and Desrochers, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, 2004b). The increasing competitiveness of the global market and the shift to an information, service, and technology-based economy in the U.S. propels a growing need for college-educated professionals.

Improving academic preparation for college and ensuring affordability, especially for low-income students and students of color, are those rare policy goals that enjoy widespread, active support across a wide spectrum of educational researchers, policymakers, and advocates (Advisory Commission on Student Financial Assistance, 2002; Heller, 2003; Pathways to College, 2003). And although college enrollments are 72 percent larger today than they were in 1970 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), bridging the access gap is complicated. We know that despite decades of concerted policy efforts and extensive financial aid resources, today's gap between low-income and high-income students today is roughly the same as that participation gap in the 1960s (Gladieux and Swail, 1999).

That gap is partially a result of the fact that both the perception and the reality of college affordability is plummeting. In this decade alone 440,000 potential students will be turned away from four-year colleges due to financial reasons (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2002).



Through decades of policy creep our student aid system has become less oriented toward expanding opportunity for needy students and more toward making it possible to recruit the best middle and upper income students as financial aid is increasingly awarded in the form of merit-based aid (Heller, 2002). Enrollment management practices have led to institutional practices like tuition discounting and large proportions of unmet financial need, while federal, state and institutional grant availability has led to an increased reliance on loans with skyrocketing student loan debt (McPherson and Shapiro, 2002). Overall this lessening of need-based aid has eroded low-income students' participation in higher education, particularly at more selective institutions (Carnevale and Rose, 2003).

The world of college admissions has changed dramatically over the last half century. Before the 1950s, 20 percent of high school graduates went on to college and today 65 percent do (Kinzie et al., 2004). Because of the increased competition, high-socioeconomic (SES) students, who have been attending college for generations, are filing larger numbers of applications to hedge their uncertain admissions bets, while colleges hedge their *U.S. News and World Report* rankings' bets by boosting their yield rates through early admission programs (Avery et al., 2003). Admissions policies and preferences for certain groups of students is the focus of a never-ending stream of media reports, litigation, advocacy and research. Race-conscious admissions policies still exist in some states, including percent plans even though new research has proven that they offer very little hope for increasing African American and Latino students' presence on more selective college campuses (Carnevale and Rose, 2003; Tienda, Cortes, and Niu, 2003). Researchers and college presidents are advocating for adding socioeconomic diversity to existing affirmative action plans (Basinger and Smallwood, 2004; Carnevale and Rose, 2003) to increase the low and stagnant numbers of poor students entering college.

Today, we have 2.6 million high school graduates and current projections are that we will peak at 3.2 million high school graduates in 2008–09. Eighty percent of those new students will be students of color and a disproportionate number will be from poor or modest income families (WICHE, 2004). Yet, only about half of African American and Latino ninth graders graduate from high school, compared to almost four-fifths of Asian Americans and three-quarters of Whites. For those who stay in high school to graduate, low-income and underrepresented minority students have more limited access to the rigorous coursework needed for college readiness (Green and Forster, 2003). Subsequently, although the number of African American, Latino, and Native

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Repeated studies have found that improving counseling would have a significant impact on college access for low-income, rural, and urban students as well as students of color.



American students enrolled in college has risen, those enrollment figures are far below the representation of those students in K-12 schools and below what would be projected for average college attendance given those K-12 enrollment figures (Allen, 2003).

In large part that is because individual college opportunity is predicated on K-12 institutional opportunity. Opportunities to learn are in good measure reflective of the following K-12 school conditions: the quality of the school as measured by the level of rigor of curriculum, learning environments and resources; the quality of teachers as indicated by teacher test scores and teacher preparation; the expectations and encouragement that teachers hold for students; the persistent and pernicious racial and ethnic segregation in American schools; the availability, quantity and quality of high school counseling; droupout rates; and financial constraints (Gandara and Bial, 2001). Reports on the condition of K-12 education in low-performing schools that serve primarily urban students of color find that these schools “shock the conscience” because they lack minimal learning essentials: books, qualified teachers, and safe places to learn (Oakes, 2004).

Thus, K-12 student achievement rates between underrepresented minority and majority students are still profoundly unequal (Oakes, 2004; Pathways to College, 2003) and poor students and students of color still experience major barriers to college access (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000). Is it any wonder that today’s gaps in high school graduation and college enrollment are tied to race and income or that one-third of white U.S. adults in their late twenties have a college degree but only 18 percent of Black and 10 percent of Hispanic adults have those same degrees (Pathways to College, 2003)? Yet, despite the inequities in outcomes, sixty percent of adults believe that, regardless of costs, education is so indispensable that they will do whatever it takes to ensure their child’s college attendance (Ikenberry and Hartle, 1998; Miller, 1997).

Many current K-12 accountability systems focus on minimally acceptable performance, not the college readiness required of 21st-Century workers. A wealth of policy reports acknowledge that K-12 schools must be significantly transformed and there is near unanimity from policymakers, foundations, and a growing body of research evidence that P-16 systems will ensure greater alignment between high school exit skills and the skills required for college entry and success.



More to the point of this paper, repeated studies have found that improving counseling would have a significant impact on college access for low-income, rural, and urban students as well as students of color (Gandara and Bial 2001; King, 1996; McDonough, 2004; Plank and Jordan, 2001; Rosenbaum, Miller and Krei, 1996; Venezia et al., 2002). Specifically, if counselors begin actively supporting students and their families in middle school in preparing for college, as opposed to simply disseminating information, this will increase students’ chances of enrolling in a four-year college (Hutchinson and Reagan, 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997, 1999; Plank and Jordan, 2001; Powell, 1996; Rowe, 1989).

Multiple, recent research studies and policy reports call for increasing the numbers of counselors available and the amount of time they devote to college advising tasks one of the top three reforms needed to improve college access (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2002; Gandara and Bial, 2001; Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1997; Kirst and Venezia, 2004; McDonough, 2004). Yet, how do these calls for more counselors devoted to college preparation map onto the current state of counseling in America?

This paper reviews the research evidence on what students need to do when preparing for college, the history of school counseling, counselors’ work and availability, research evidence on good college counseling, the professional associations, and recommendations. The time has never been better for college counselors to collaborate with all other school counselors and school leaders, and for the major, national counseling associations to collaborate with college access advocacy organizations to improve the state of college counseling.

Preparation for Improved College Access

The pathway to college access is marked by vast disparities in college preparation, college knowledge, and college culture within schools, (McDonough, 2004). In 1992, 82 percent of students whose parents were college-educated enrolled in college directly out of high school, but only 54 percent of students whose parents had completed high school, and only 36 percent of students whose parents had less than a high school diploma immediately enrolled in college after high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In 1992, 64 percent of whites, but only 55 percent of blacks and 52 percent of Hispanics immediately enrolled in college after high school. In 1992, only 44 percent of low-income families, while 80 percent of high-income families immediately enrolled in college after high school.

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How do students get to college? A major new report from Educational Testing Service acknowledges that college preparation begins in preschool (Carnevale and Desrochers, 2003). Students aspire and apply to, then enroll in college through a complex, longitudinal, interactive process involving individual aspiration and achievement, learning opportunities in high school and intervention programs, and institutional admissions (Hossler et al. 1989; McDonough, 1997; Oakes, 2004).

Student aspirations precede the development of college plans, college preparation precedes college choice, and all of the foregoing are the precursors to college enrollment. Along the pathway to college and over the course of elementary, middle and high school, students pass through predisposition, search, and choice stages where they decide whether to attend college, search for information, consider specific colleges, and finally choose a college destination (Hossler, Braxton and Coopersmith, 1989).

Generally speaking, the predisposition stage is where a student begins to develop occupational and educational aspirations, and this generally occurs from elementary school age on through middle school. Research shows that most students have some post-high school educational or job plans by the ninth grade (Stage and Hossler, 1989). Students need to begin to develop college awareness aspirations in the middle school years in order to take algebra, and other gatekeeping courses in middle school, which then positions students for high school course work that aligns well with college enrollment requirements (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000). Students and their families need counseling to develop this awareness and planning, and middle schools need to raise standards and expectations (Gullat and Jan, 2002). It is in this stage that students need to be informed of college entrance requirements, be enrolled in a college preparatory curriculum, be engaged in extracurricular activities, and begin to learn in broad-brush ways about financing a college education (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Hearn and Holdsworth, 2004).

During the tenth through twelfth grades, students are in the search phase, which involves gathering the information necessary for students to develop their short list of potential colleges (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000). High socioeconomic status (SES) students in this phase have more information sources, are more knowledgeable about college costs, and tend to have parents engaged in saving for college (Hossler, Schmidt and Vesper, 1999).

The choice phase of the decision to go to college begins in the eleventh grade, usually culminating in the twelfth grade. College costs and financial



aid play a dramatic role in the college choices of low-SES students, African Americans and Latinos, all of whom are highly sensitive to tuition and financial aid (Heller, 1999). These students are negatively influenced by high tuition (McPherson and Shapiro, 1998) but positively influenced by financial aid (Berkner and Chavez, 1997).

Many students cannot easily complete these steps in the school-to-college transition given most K-12 schools systems' capacity for college preparation. One policy report's assessment is that the current structure of middle and high schools is inadequate to prepare minority, low-income, and first-generation students to attend college and to change that condition will require significantly transforming high schools, and possibly reinventing education as a P-16 system (Martinez and Klopott, 2003).

A Focused History of School Counseling

Within modern school counseling, the value placed on the college counseling task has been shaped by multiple forces. Throughout the last century, one major influence has been the dominance of other roles, specifically, psychological development, testing, administrative support, and students' personal therapeutic counseling needs (Boswell and Carr, 1998; Hugo, 2004).

A second influence has been a longstanding, sometimes acrimonious debate about whether and how college counseling should be a part of school counselors' work. An early argument against college counseling was that it was not actual guidance, but the unseemly work of subtle persuasion or salesmanship (Tibby, 1965). Until the 1990s, college advising was seen as simply information dispensing in the counseling literature (Cole, 1991) and, a significant segment of the college advising support industry (books, CDs, self-help college materials) is premised on this fundamental assumption (McDonough, Ventresca and Outcalt, 2000). Other counselors view college advising as esoteric (Cole, 1991; Murro, 1963) and in conflict with counselors' identities as mental health agents (Carroll, 1985). Some counselors bristle at the elitism inherent in providing disproportionate institutional resources for college advising to small numbers of college-bound students (Avis, 1982; NACAC, 1986), even though almost nine out of ten students now say they plan on going to college (U.S. Department of Education 2003a; Venezia, Kirst and Antonio, 2003).

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Inadequate research evidence of counselor impact on student learning and development has led to counselors' vulnerability in times of budget cuts.

A third force influencing the development of college counseling has been the impact of scholarly research that identified and criticized counselors' gatekeeping functions and subsequently influenced public discourse and policy debates (Rosenbaum et al., 1996). Cicourel and Kitsuse first (1963) described and critiqued counselors' exercise of professional responsibility for determining which students were college material based on their personal assessments of students' character, maturity and appearance. Rosenbaum later (1976) critiqued counselors' practices in thwarting working-class students' access to college preparatory curricular tracks and other means of discouraging students' college aspirations.

Another factor that has increasingly shaped counselors' jobs and made them more vulnerable to administrative demands has been counselors' inability to demonstrate their effectiveness. Inadequate research evidence of counselor impact on student learning and development has led to counselors' vulnerability in times of budget cuts (Aubrey, 1982; Avis, 1982; Carroll, 1985; Cole, 1991; Kehas, 1975; Miller and Boller, 1975). Moreover, counselor effectiveness is only possible by meeting counselors' pre-service and in-service professional development needs. Historically, counseling education programs (Hossler, 1999; McDonough, 2004; National Association of College Admission Counselors, 1991) have not included preparation in the area of college counseling. Counselors have major professional development needs related to securing accurate, up-to-date college admissions and financial aid information (Chapman and DeMasi, 1984). Yet, Moles (1991) found that counselors attend three in-service programs annually across all counseling domains. Hawkins (2003) found that nine out of ten counselors received time off for professional development, however, only 42 percent received full financial support (registration fees, travel expenses, etc.), and only 21 percent of public school counselors received full financial support for those professional development activities. Additional training is necessary. To give one example, because counselors are not trained in, nor knowledgeable about, the student aid system and college costs, they are unable to adequately help students and parents understand what they need to know about college costs and the financial aid system (McDonough, 2004).

Role conflicts have emerged from differing expectations of counselors and principals (Hugo, 2004; Partin, 1990). Counselors who view resolving students' social-emotional problems as an important goal are often in conflict with principals who seldom perceive this task as a central role for counselors (Chapman and DeMasi, 1984). Moreover, as principals' jobs have expanded, they have redirected counselors' work to include additional administrative

As principals' jobs have expanded, they have redirected counselors' work to include additional administrative duties like scheduling and yard duty.



duties like scheduling and yard duty (Cole, 1991; Day and Sparacio, 1980; Hugo, 2004; Monson and Brown, 1985). Other researchers have noted that some of counselors' competing roles, like enforcing school discipline rules, undermine counselors' roles as advocates and confidants (Tennyson et al., 1989). Finally, accountability reforms have lead to increased testing responsibilities for counselors, which has resulted in further confusion over the proper role of counseling in general, and reduced capacity for carrying out the college counseling function in particular.

Complicating matters further is the fact that over the last several decades, many counseling programs have migrated from education departments into psychology departments resulting in increased family and clinical practice training; a considerably more desirable and higher status role (Aubrey, 1982; Carroll, 1985), and a subsequent shift in professional identity to mental health agents whose primary goal is helping adolescents through the challenges and pitfalls of adolescence (Aubrey, 1982; Carroll, 1985; Huey, 1987). On a positive note, this identity and training shift has provided counselors with alternative job options when school counseling positions have been eliminated (Carroll, 1985; Hull, 1979).

Counselor Availability and Jobs

The federal government's Occupational Outlook Handbook (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004a/b) states that high school counselors "advise students regarding college majors, admission requirements, entrance exams, financial aid, trade or technical schools, and apprenticeship programs." Research and textbooks on school counseling say that counselors' work in schools includes 1) coordination of administrative tasks (scheduling, etc.), 2) counseling across academic, career and personal domains, and 3) consultation with all school personnel on guidance tasks (Hannaford, 1987). The realities of counselor-to-student ratios mean that counselors often have to rely on large group guidance in order to reach, at least minimally, all students (American School Counselor Association, 2001; Gysbers and Henderson, 1997).

In U.S. public schools, there are not many counselors, and in urban and rural schools, and schools serving low-SES students and students of color, counselors are fewer and often unavailable for the college advising job.

How many counselors are there in American schools, how available are they to students, and how available are they for the college counseling

In U.S. public schools, there are not many counselors, and in urban and rural schools, and schools serving low-SES students and students of color, counselors are fewer and often unavailable for the college advising job.



task? We can answer these questions by looking at total numbers of school professional holding counseling titles, by looking at student-to-counselor ratios, and by looking at estimates of how much time counselors spend on their various assignments.

In-depth counselor data are not systematically and routinely collected at federal and state levels. NCES has mostly been content to collect headcount data on counselors, supplemented by infrequent surveys of program goals and activities. Many NCES reports do not even bother to distinguish between full- or part-time counselors. Acknowledging that the federal government had not collected any data on guidance programs and activities since 1984, in 2002 NCES (U.S. Department of Education, 2003), through its Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), conducted a survey of public high school guidance counseling entitled, High School Guidance Counseling (HSGC). Also, NACAC's annual surveys give a good picture of NACAC member counselors, in other words a good picture of the group of good college counselors available in U.S. high schools, but despite all efforts, the comparative sample of non-NACAC members has had a low response rate. The College Board occasionally surveys high schools and their counselors but provides limited public reports on the counseling data.

Using the most recent NCES data, public high schools average 2.6 counselors per school, yet this figure counts full- and part-time counselors the same. If you disaggregate the data, high-poverty schools have an average of 1.3 full- and part-time counselors per school (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). A College Board (Maucieri et al., 2002) survey reports that the average number of counselors per public high school was 2.7 counselors-to-students and that nearly all counselors reported providing college counseling as a part of their job. It would seem as though we can look across this data and conclude that the average public school has less than three counselors, some of which are full-time and some of which are part-time.

Knowing how many counselors there are in a given school does not give us enough context to understand if the number of counselors is enough for the number of students in those schools. So we need to look at student-to-counselor ratios, while keeping in mind that the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends an ideal counselor-to-student ratio of 100:1.

In public schools across America student-to-counselor ratios are outrageously high. According to The Condition of Education 2004 the ratio is 284:1, although in large schools and schools with more than 20 percent



minority students the ratios are >300:1 (US Department of Education, 2004). The HSGC report, using separate NCES data, determined that public high schools averaged 315 students per counselor. According to NACAC the national average is 490:1 (Hawkins, 2003) and other reports on the largest urban metropolitan areas find a 740:1 average (Fitzsimmons, 1991). Statewide averages show even more disturbing trends, with California as the notorious leader in highest student-to-counselor ratios at 994:1, followed by Minnesota at 800:1, and Arizona with 736:1. In one study of California counseling, Paul (2002) found an even higher ratio of 1,056 students assigned to an individual counselor. Finally, some individual high schools in large, urban school districts effectively have no counselors. For example, Freemont High School in Los Angeles Unified School District has a student to counselor ratio of 5000:1 (Perez, 2004) Regardless of which counseling numbers you refer to, at a minimum, there are three times (and up to 50 times) as many students assigned to each of those full- and part-time counselors as what the profession believes is appropriate.

Some individual high schools in large, urban school districts effectively have no counselors. For example, Freemont High School in Los Angeles Unified School District has a student to counselor ratio of 5000:1.

Now that we have a sense of how many students are in counselors caseloads, what do these full- and part-time counselors do with their time? ASCA has set a benchmark that 70 percent of counselors' time should be spent in direct services to students. Interestingly, NCES does not collect data on how much of counselors' time is spent in direct service to students so we do not have accurate national data on this issue. Also, NCES reports how counselors spend their time in a disaggregated fashion, such that we know the percentage of schools whose counselors spend increments (up to 20 percent or more) of their time on a limited number of tasks. A 1998 NACAC study that over-sampled college counselors found that public school counselors spend 50 percent of their time in direct service to students carrying an average caseload of approximately 330 students (Miller, 1998).

Since we don't know how much time counselors spend in direct service, how much time do they spend on college advising? Across multiple surveys the vast majority of counselors report they engage in college advising and that they value it equally to their other counseling tasks. Yet, a 1991 NCES study (Moles) found that counselors reported they spent only 13 percent of their time in college guidance, compared to 25 percent in personal development. According to the NCES HSGC study (US Department of Education, 2003), only 43 percent of all public high schools reported that more than 20 percent of their counselors' time is spent on college advising which meant that 57 percent of schools' counselors spend between 0-19 percent of their time on college advising. Using NCES's ratio of 315 students per counselor in public

“On average, the precollege counseling infrastructure is lacking in secondary schools across the country, as the national student-to-counselor ratio remains high at 490 to one. Public schools and rural schools suffer from the worst counseling shortages. Schools with supportive environments for postsecondary education, including a well-staffed counseling department, reported significantly higher rates of college attendance.”



high schools, and the Moles estimate of hours the average school counselor spends on college counseling, counselors are spending 38 minutes per year on each student for college advising.

Other research paints a different picture of how counselors spend their time. We have ample evidence that in day-to-day practice, the overwhelming amount of effort of counselors revolves around the tasks of scheduling, testing, and discipline (Delany, 1991; Lombana, 1985; McDonough, 1997, 2004; McDonough, Ventresca and Outcalt, 2000; Monson and Brown, 1985; Wilson and Rossman, 1993), with additional needs for counseling related to dropout, drug, pregnancy, and suicide prevention, as well as sexuality and personal crisis counseling (Miller 1998), yard duty, substitute teaching, etc. (US Department of Education, 2003). One important thing to note in the discrepancy between these studies and NCES is that large-scale surveys are only as good as their questions and if those instruments are not adequately asking about counselors’ roles and time spent it will be impossible to get good data.

A final way of looking at counseling in high schools is through the goals of guidance programs writ large. In large-scale surveys, counselors are usually asked what are the main goals of the counseling program. NCES collects data on four such goals: helping students prepare for work after high school, helping students with personal growth and development, helping students prepare for college, and helping students with academic achievement in high school. Forty eight percent of all schools, report emphasizing academic achievement, 26 percent emphasize college preparation, 17 percent emphasize personal development and 8 percent report emphasizing work preparation. The smallest schools (<400 students) were more likely to report a primary emphasis on preparing students for college.

After looking at numbers of counselors, student to counselor ratios, goals of programs and how counselors spend their time on various tasks, what can be said about college counseling in America? In a recent NACAC survey, Hawkins (2003) summarized the state of the college advising task as follows:

“On average, the precollege counseling infrastructure is lacking in secondary schools across the country, as the national student-to-counselor ratio remains high at 490 to one. Public schools and rural schools suffer from the worst counseling shortages. Schools with supportive environments for postsecondary education, including a well-staffed counseling department, reported significantly higher rates of college attendance.”



Counseling Disparities and Contributions

A plethora of research has grown up documenting the great disparities in counseling resources, especially as they pertain to college counseling. Nearly 20 years ago, NACAC documented that the great disparities in college counseling resources and activities were a direct result of the social class of the communities in which these high schools were located (1986). Specifically, school counselors in upper income neighborhoods were more plentiful and spent more time on college counseling. Orfield and Paul (1993) found high school counseling programs at fault for students' and parents' lack of necessary college access information including an understanding of the influence of high school track, college admissions requirements, and the system of college costs and financial aid. Other research found that African American and Latino students were significantly more likely to have their college plans influenced by their high school counselors (Lee and Ekstrom, 1987; Plank and Jordan, 2001) and yet these were the students who were least likely to have counselors, the most likely to have underprepared counselors, and the most likely to have counselors pulled away from college counseling to work on other counseling tasks (Paul, 2002). Moreover, students of color expressed grave reluctance to use counselors because they were perceived to be uninformed and hostile (Gandara and Bial, 2001), have well documented reputations for placing students in non-college-recommending classes (Atkinson, Jennings, and Livingston, 1990), and historically have thwarted students' and their parents' educational aspirations (Lareau and Horvat, 1999; Perez, 1999). It is important to note, that those populations who are especially hard hit in terms of unmet or inadequate counseling are primarily low-income communities, schools, and students of color (McDonough, 1999; Paul, 2002).

Counseling often is tied to the track placement of students, therefore, if you are not in the college track you do not receive college information. African American and Latino students as well as first-generation college bound students are significantly more likely than their white counterparts to have their college plans influenced by their high school counselors, both potentially positively and negatively (Lee and Ekstrom, 1987; Plank and Jordan, 2001).

Counselors have never been able to capture the attention of school administrators or policymakers and thus are frequent targets for budget cuts and are perennially ignored in accountability systems and data collection for educational indicator systems (McDonough, 1997; Whiston, 1996). Both Corwin and colleagues (2004) and Hugo (2004) articulate the problems

American and Latino students as well as first-generation college bound students are significantly more likely than their white counterparts to have their college plans influenced by their high school counselors, both potentially positively and negatively.

Four key components of the high school have a tremendous impact on college attendance: a college preparatory curriculum; a college culture which establishes high academic standards and includes formal and informal communication networks that promote and support college expectations; a school staff that collectively is committed to students' college goals; and resources devoted to counseling and advising college-bound students (Alexander and Eckland, 1977; Boyle, 1966; Bryk, Lee and Holland, 1993.



that arise for counselors who know too well the devastation that comes from neglect of counseling in public schools. Yet, Whiston (1996) documents that counselors also know that they lack the hard evidence that could persuade state and local policymakers and school administrators of the need and potential benefits of hiring more school counselors. Moreover, Grubb and Watson (2002) concede that the general consensus is that counseling and guidance are among the weakest services in most high schools, and that there is very little research evidence on what counselors do.

Two disparities in counselors' work stem from work with parents and counselors' roles within schools in creating or sustaining college cultures. One counselor role that is nearly completely missing in schools that serve low-income students and students of color is working with parents. Although much has been known for a long time about the fact that parents tend to be the most powerful influence on their students' educational aspirations in general and college plans in particular, it was only beginning in the mid-1980s that parents were identified as a service population for counselors as a means of serving students in the college-going process (Boyer, 1987; Chapman and DeMasi, 1984; National Association for College Admission Counseling, 1986). Boyer identified parents' need for basic college information, while Chapman and DeMasi pinpointed major parental needs regarding financial aid, and the NACAC study showed that, even though most high schools had college fairs and college information sessions, nonetheless, over 400 high schools across the U.S. did not even have these simplest of parental college informational and engagement activities. Other more recent studies have focused heavily on parents and their roles in their students' college aspirations and enrollments, and these studies definitively show that parents, particularly Latino and African American parents, need to be on counselors' agendas (Perez, 2000; Tierney and Auerbach, 2004; Tomas Rivera Institute, 2004; Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio, 2002).

Second, it is important to look beyond the individual counselor working with a student in her/his office. The high school environment has a powerful influence on students' college aspirations and preparation. Four key components of the high school have a tremendous impact on college attendance: a college preparatory curriculum; a college culture which establishes high academic standards and includes formal and informal communication networks that promote and support college expectations; a school staff that collectively is committed to students' college goals; and resources devoted to counseling and advising college-bound students (Alexander and Eckland, 1977; Boyle, 1966; Bryk, Lee and Holland, 1993;



Cookson and Persell, 1985; Falsey and Heyns, 1984; Hotchkiss and Vetter, 1987; McDonough, 1994, 1997; Powell, 1996).

One common thread running through the research evidence on the school's role in structuring students' aspirations and actual college preparatory opportunities is that guidance and counseling staff can help to establish a school's college culture. But that culture needs to be held and acted upon by knowledgeable staff who affect students in daily interactions apart from specific college preparatory programs (Hotchkiss and Vetter, 1987; McDonough, 1994 and 1997; McDonough and McClafferty 2000).

High schools have different structural arrangements for counseling in general, and college advising in particular (McDonough 1997). Guidance counselors have a direct impact on students, and more importantly, they create and implement the school's normative expectations for students' college destination and how to prepare for them. They create a worldview for students and their parents that delimits the full universe of 3000 possible college choices into a smaller range (1–8) of cognitively manageable considerations. Schools and counselors construct this worldview in response to their perceptions of the parents' and community's expectations for appropriate college destinations, combined with the counselor's own knowledge and experience base.

Thus from research, we know that counselors impact students' aspirations, plans, enrollments, financial aid knowledge and that meeting frequently with a counselor increases a student's chance of enrolling in a four-year college, and if students, parents, and counselors work together and communicate clearly students' chances of enrolling in college significantly increases. Moreover, the effect of socioeconomic status on the college enrollment of low-income students is largely explained by the lack of adequate counseling (King, 1996; Plank and Jordan, 2001).

Counselors have an impact on the following components of the college preparation and advising task: 1) structuring information and organizing activities that foster and support students' college aspirations and an understanding of college and its importance, 2) assisting parents in understanding their role in fostering and supporting college aspirations, setting of college expectations, and motivating students; 3) assisting students in academic preparation for college; 4) supporting and influencing students in decision-making about college, and 5) organizationally focusing the school on its college mission (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 2004).

One common thread running through the research evidence on the school's role in structuring students' aspirations and actual college preparatory opportunities is that guidance and counseling staff can help to establish a school's college culture.

If counselors actively support students and their family through the college admissions process, as opposed to simply disseminating information, this will increase students' chances of enrolling in a four-year college.



Repeated studies have found that improving counseling would have a significant impact on college access for low-income, rural, and urban students as well as students of color (Gandara and Bial 2001; King, 1996; Plank and Jordan, 2001; Rosenbaum, Miller and Krei, 1996; Venezia et al., 2003). Specifically, if counselors actively support students and their family through the college admissions process, as opposed to simply disseminating information, this will increase students' chances of enrolling in a four-year college.

But, counselors have too many jobs assigned to them to be effective, they are not allowed to fulfill the jobs for which they have been trained, and parents and students feel counselors are not focusing on the most important jobs. Moreover, they can not satisfy the competing demands of parents, students, school personnel (Freeman and Coll, 1997).

Thus counselors are structurally constrained from doing the job they know and do best. Specifically in the junior and senior year, counselors can significantly help students and parents by:

- reducing anxiety
- providing application profile enhancement in the form of test coaching, essay assistance, proofing and effective means of self-presentation
- helping students realize the wide range of college options and find the best personal match
- presenting students in the most effective ways in letters of recommendation
- maintaining professional networks with college admission officers.

Alternative Forms of Counseling

There is much to be learned in comparative analyses. Three ways to compare public school counseling are with college preparatory or “prep” schools, outreach programs, and private counselors. Counseling was first developed in prep schools in the 1950s when college admissions offices faced a surge of applications and prep school heads could no longer call admissions offices and “place” their students into a small number of elite colleges. In stark contrast to public schools, prep school counselors are exclusively devoted to college counseling. The psychological counseling components so prevalent in public schools is outsourced to private therapists who have minimal connection to the school (Powell, 1996). A competing public school counseling function, scheduling, is not a significant function in prep schools because of their relatively small size and their singular mission, therefore all courses are college preparatory.



A second comparison comes from college intervention programs. Low-income students and students of color are often deprived of college-enabling conditions in their K-12 schools. Too often, these students are enrolled in high schools that fail to meet the entrance requirements of more competitive colleges because of shortages of qualified teachers and college counselors, and inadequate honors and advanced placement classes, etc. (Oakes et al., 2002).

Pre-collegiate outreach or intervention programs are designed to supplement schools and communities with resources that are helpful for students preparing for college. Most intervention programs target improving opportunities for individual students, rather than changing the structure or functioning of schools, and thus are student-centered, rather than, school-centered programs. But inadequate preparation for college is an institutional problem not an individual problem. By design, outreach programs are inequitable because they target only a small percentage of students and they do not and can not serve all students consistently.

College preparation intervention programs can double the college-going rates for at-risk youth (Horn, 1997), can expand students’ educational aspirations, can increase students’ educational and cultural capital assets can boost college enrollment and graduation rates (Gandara and Bial, 2001; Perna and Swail, 2002; Tierney et al., 2004). Moreover, the benefits are often greatest for low-income students with low initial expectations and achievement (Myers and Schrim, 1999). Counselors are one of the key reasons for these programs’ effectiveness (Gandara and Bial, 2001; McDonough, 2004; Tierney et al., 2004).

A final comparison comes from private college counselors. Increasingly competitive college admissions have made college entry a complex, high risk, and stressful task. In the absence of cohesive college advising programs within schools (and sometimes even in the presence of such programs), some high SES students and their parents have looked to private counselors to: provide access to specialized knowledge, coach on tests and essays, “hand-hold” students through the admission process, keep the admissions process organized and the student on schedule, and help with peer pressure and learning disabilities or other special circumstances. Private counselors spend more time with college-bound students than any type of school-based counselor, public or private, and most are available both by phone and in-person during evenings or weekends (McDonough, 1994; McDonough et al. 1997). The privatized and costly nature of this support precludes access by lower SES college aspirants who arguably need it most.

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Counselors, high school counseling, and college-related counseling are not the foci of adequate, nationally representative quantitative or qualitative data collection.



Professional Associations of Counselors

There are three major national counseling associations: The American Counseling Association, the American School Counselor Association, and the National Association for College Admission Counseling. The American Counseling Association is “the world’s largest association exclusively representing professional counselors in various practice settings” (American Counseling Association, 2004). Of its 18 divisions of professional specialization, there is the American College Counseling Association which began in 1991. However, unlike what one could surmise from its name, ACCA’s mission is to foster student development within postsecondary institutions, not to help students get to college.

Of all ACA’s current public policy initiatives mentioned on their Web site, the only one relevant to the role of school counselors in college advising is a lobbying effort to fight President Bush’s third attempt to eliminate the \$33.8 million for the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program. This program is the only source of federal funding for counseling. While it is currently only funded at the elementary school level, it plays a crucial role in providing access to counseling services through a grants process designed to reward innovative counseling projects. Laudable as this initiative is, it demonstrates a lack of federal commitment to counseling and fails to directly address middle and secondary school college advising needs (ACA, 2004).

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is an independent organization, yet it is affiliated with the American Counseling Association as a division. ASCA mission is to assist “school counselors’ efforts to help students focus on academic, personal/social and career development” (American School Counselor Association, 2004a). In its position statements, ASCA emphasizes an academic developmental focus on skills acquisition, attitudes and knowledge while its career development focuses on a “successful transition from school to careers” (American School Counselor Association, 2004b). ASCA has a long list of position statements that include character education, high stakes testing, special needs students, etc. The only official mention of college advising needs in its position or mission statements is on college entrance exams, which reads: “Professional school counselors help students and their families become aware of college entrance test preparation programs” (American School Counselor Association, 2004b).

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) is “dedicated to serving students as they make choices about pursuing



postsecondary education... with particular emphasis on the transition from secondary schools to higher education and with attention to access and equity for all students” (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2004a). This professional group provides direct support to any high school counselor involved in college advising, although most high school counselors are not NACAC members.

A professional association that could be of great help to high school counselors in advising students and their families is the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) which seeks to advance “the professional preparation, effectiveness, and mutual support of persons involved in student financial aid administration” (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, 2004). Interestingly enough, their mission statement explicitly focuses only on postsecondary personnel and institutions.

What seems problematic from the outside is that these professional associations, and more importantly the counselors who belong to each of these organizations, are not working together on common policy agendas, or with the many other educational associations and advocacy groups now calling for significant investment in college access, and specifically calling for more counselors dedicated to improving college access. Why are college counselors expected to take care of college preparation and advising and other counselors not expected to engage in this work? Why aren’t all counselors attending annual meetings of NACAC, regional ACACs, College Board, and the many other college advising training and professional development workshops? Why is there so little overlap between college counselors and all other school counselors? Why is NACAC, ASCA, and advocacy groups like Pathways to College, etc. not joining forces and meeting with NASFAA to encourage college financial aid officers to train high school counselors, to routinely (not just at the request of the dedicated, savvy college counselor) run financial aid workshops at high schools for students, parents, and teachers, and to have joint annual meetings or offer reduced registration fees at each other’s annual meetings? Why is NACAC, ASCA, and advocacy groups like Pathways to College, etc. not joining forces and meeting with the National Association of Secondary School Principals to develop professional development workshops and publications for new and continuing principals about what good counseling for college looks like and why counselors should not be pulled off that task for yard duty?

Helping students
prepare for college
or assisting students
in enrolling in
college is not written
into any existing
accountability
system, any
leadership
performance
evaluation, or any K-
12 job description.
Yet, most of the
American public,
journalists, and
policymakers
assume that
adequate numbers
and adequately
trained high school
counselors are doing
this job.

Research clearly shows that counselors, when consistently and frequently available and authorized to provide direct services to students and parents, can be a highly effective group of professionals who impact students' aspirations, achievements, college enrollments, and financial aid knowledge.



Conclusions

In America, high school counseling, and in particular college counseling, has multiple personalities. The counseling profession is both valued and unvalued, highly effective and of little impact. Different constituencies would describe the primary job description as administrative, while others would say academic, and yet others would say therapeutic. So, what is the nature of counseling? What is the state of the art of counseling? And how can discrepant views such as these be reconciled?

Research clearly shows that counselors, when consistently and frequently available and authorized to provide direct services to students and parents, can be a highly effective group of professionals who impact students' aspirations, achievements, college enrollments, and financial aid knowledge. On the other hand, although nine out of ten students feel their counselor is knowledgeable about colleges (but not about financial aid) they report not getting the assistance they need from counselors. Is college counseling a task of information dispensing or a task of advising?

In fiscally austere times in public schools, counseling positions are among the “nonessentials” cut. When not eliminated, counselors’ main jobs—as defined by principals and demanded by accountability systems—are scheduling, testing, and discipline. After that, in public schools located in middle and upper class neighborhoods the priority is college counseling. But in schools in poor neighborhoods with large numbers of students of color, the next counseling priorities are dropout, drug, pregnancy, and suicide prevention, along with sexuality, personal and crisis counseling. Then as time permits or teaching loads are increased to make more counselors available, there is attention to college counseling. Within high schools, the work of college counselors is frequently separate and apart from the rest of the counseling operations.

A third of American counselors are in high-poverty public high schools, the schools that enroll the vast majority of low-income students and students of color, the schools that enroll a significant proportion of the 12.8 million high school students today (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Some of these schools have student-to-counselor ratios of 500:1, some 5000:1, and some multi-track, year-round schools in urban areas have no counselors available for certain tracks of students.



Contrast this with private schools, for which parents pay tens of thousands of dollars, where counseling programs are focused **only** on college counseling. In fact, the parents with the most money and the highest levels of postsecondary education spend thousands of dollars for private counselors when school counselors are not available or adequate to the college task, even in private schools.

Counseling is also, in many ways, a nearly invisible profession. Counselors, high school counseling, and college-related counseling are not the foci of adequate, nationally representative quantitative or qualitative data collection. The College Board, NACAC, and The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) all collect data on counselors but these efforts are incomplete. Moreover, counseling is off the radar in virtually all accountability schemas. Helping students prepare for college or assisting students in enrolling in college is not written into any existing accountability system, any leadership performance evaluation, or any K-12 job description. Yet, most of the American public, journalists, and policymakers assume that adequate numbers and adequately trained high school counselors are doing this job.

Major counseling textbooks used to train new counselors rarely, if ever, mention or index “college” or “college counseling.” Consequently, coursework in graduate education rarely, if ever, includes training in college counseling.

The major national counseling associations appear to be fragmented. High school counselors sometimes belong to the American Counseling Association, often to the American School Counselor Association, and rarely (except for college counselors) to the National Association for College Admission Counseling. ACA and ASCA do not mention college advising in their Web sites or mission statements, with the exception of mentioning college entrance exams. From these professional associations there is no uniform voice or obvious history of collaboration to improve the state of counseling or college counseling. From the outside, it would appear as though in an era of calls for P-16 collaboration and reform, counseling associations are fractured and isolated.

Yet, we have definitive evidence that improving high school counseling and equalizing students’ access to counseling would likely have a significant impact on improving college access for underserved populations. In fact, counseling is generally agreed upon as one of the three main needs for improving college access for poor students and students of color (along with a more rigorous high school curriculum and a better financial aid system).

Currently the general state of counseling is not an important point on any major policy agenda. However, college access is an important educational and economic policy issue, a lynchpin in P-16 reforms, an imperative for advocates for improving affordability, and essential to policymakers wishing to reduce barriers to college admission.

The Changing Landscape of Higher Education: The Future of College Admission



William G. Tierney

Wilbur Kieffer Professor of Higher Education and Director

Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis

University of Southern California

WPH 701

Los Angeles CA 90089-0031

213/740-7218

Fax: 213/740-3889

wgtiem@usc.edu

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Access to college is not simply an individual good that is of benefit to whoever is able to attend a postsecondary institution; access to college is a national imperative.



College-going might be studied from any number of perspectives. Access to college, for example, might be thought of as a philosophical argument about how a nation perceives of a public good. Is a college education an individual or societal benefit? An economic discussion might ensue about the import of an educated citizenry; more recent arguments about the impact of globalization on education might be developed. Sociological models might be constructed that attempt to analyze access through structural reproduction and the like (e.g. McDonough, Ventresca and Outcalt, 2000; Horvat, 2001). Psychological or economic models might investigate how a consumer goes about making a decision to go to college (e.g. Hossler, Braxton and Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler, Schmit and Vesper, 1999).

However, at the most fundamental level, college going is a triangulated relationship composed of the student, the admissions officer, and the guidance counselor. To be sure, other individuals are involved in the process, such as the parents and family of the student, the teachers and administrators in the high school, and the faculty and staff of the postsecondary institution. The nature of the triangulation also differs. Some students have parents who never attended college and have no idea how to navigate the process, and other students have parents who are able to provide fiscal support and informed guidance about how to choose a college. Some postsecondary institutions are replete with extensive admissions offices that have developed comprehensive enrollment management plans while others only have a skeletal staff. Some private high schools have counselors who meet with students and parents in the ninth grade and begin to plot out which courses to take and what to do to get admitted to a prestigious institution, whereas large urban schools may have a student-to-counselor ratio that exceeds 800:1 and only the best students receive any advice whatsoever about how to apply to college.

My focus here is on the nature of that triangulated relationship and what the future might portends. My concern is twofold. First, how will the changing landscape of higher education impact access to college? Second, what might be done to help improve the ability of students to make the right decision about college and improve access? The answers to both questions work from the belief that an educated citizenry is a democratic and economic necessity in the 21st Century. Education is a central vehicle for enabling individuals to participate in the democratic public sphere. In the early 21st Century, such participation is as important as any time in American history. Further, forty of the fifty fastest growing occupations in the nation now require at least some education after high school; yet seven out of ten students now graduate from high school without the requisite courses needed to succeed in college or in

By an intense focus on the concerns of today, those of us in higher education and the schools are not fully preparing for tomorrow.



the workplace (Center for State Scholars, 2004). In less than a decade, the nation's workforce will face a shortage of more than 12 million college-educated workers.

Accordingly, access to college is not simply an individual good that is of benefit to whoever is able to attend a postsecondary institution; access to college is a national imperative. What guides the analysis, then, is the belief that access to some form of postsecondary education must increase if the nation is to be economically competitive and maintain a vibrant democratic public sphere. Although all individuals will not need a bachelor's degree, increasingly all individuals will need some form of postsecondary education and/or training.

In what follows I delineate the challenges to increasing access by way of a discussion about the changing landscape of higher education. Frequently, discussions about the future of higher education are infused with an "either-or" quality to them. On the one hand, some scholars write as if they are academic Chicken Littles, proclaiming that the postsecondary sky is falling. Recall Peter Drucker's (1998) prediction that within a decade's time colleges and universities would be out of business, and consider the incessant drumbeat of national reports that have suggested higher education is failing America (Association of American Colleges, 1985; Bennett, 1984; Bowen, 1997). On the other hand, the demands of daily life all too often cascade in on busy individuals that preclude consideration about what the future might portend. What should be done about early decision? Should the SAT be maintained, abandoned or reformed? How might better use be made of electronic media? These and other questions demand an immediate response, but by an intense focus on the concerns of today, those of us in higher education and the schools are not fully preparing for tomorrow.

I am most certainly not a doomsayer. Little data exist that point either to the demise of, or a revolution in, postsecondary education. As I will elaborate, in a decade, the landscape of higher education will not look that much different from how it appears in 2004. However, the manner in which activities are done will have changed, and if access to college is to increase, then concerted action should occur in a way that is not readily apparent today. In order to outline the trends that may take place and how best to respond to them, I first turn to a consideration of the current context.

The Current Contexts

I have broken data down by institutional contexts, by cost, and by academic preparation and attainment. Insofar as I have called upon several databases, the time horizons vary, but in general the tables cover twenty years. Percentages in some instances may not total 100 percent due to rounding or reporting errors. The discussion pertains in large part to undergraduate enrollments.

Institutions and their populations: Over the last decade, for-profit institutions have garnered a good deal of attention. Indeed, many scholars have written about the rise of for-profit education and distance learning and suggested that they are aggressive competitors that are about to overtake the traditional public and private postsecondary sector. However, over the last decade there has actually been a decline in the attendance at for-profit institutions; consequently, the overall market share of undergraduate attendance at for-profits has declined even while students attending for-profit institutions has dramatically increased since 1980.

Public higher education remains the sector where most high school graduates go. Although private non-profit higher education experienced a decline in the 1980s, their populations have remained consistent ever since. More students are attending two-year institutions today than a generation ago, but the share of the undergraduate population attending these institutions has remained stable over the last decade.

There has been a decrease in the percentage of white students going to college and an increase in African American, Latino, and Asian students; however, the overall enrollment in U.S postsecondary institutions remains overwhelmingly Anglo. There also has been a slight decrease in male attendance at college and a slight increase in the female population. There has also been a decrease in full-time students and an increase in part-time and “mixed full-time/part-time.” The new term “mixed full-time/part-time” refers to attendance intensity. Students who attend school some months full-time and some part-time within the same academic year are identified as mixed full-time/part-time for overall attendance intensity.

Table 1: Percent of undergraduates enrolled by control and level of institution, Fall 1980, 1989-90 & 1999-00.

| | Public | Private | For-profit | All 4-year | All 2-year | Less than 2-yr IHEs | More than 1 institution |
|---------------------|--------|---------|------------|------------|------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 1980 (all students) | 78.2% | 20.9% | 0.9% | 62.6% | 37.4% | N/A | N/A |
| 1990 | 75.7% | 15.8% | 8.6% | 46.9% | 45.5% | 7.5% | N/A |
| 2000 | 79.0% | 15.8% | 5.2% | 46.4% | 44.6% | 2.7% | 6.2% |

Sources: NCES Digest of Education Statistics: 1998; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1989-1990; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1999-2000.

Table 2: Number of undergraduates enrolled by control and level of institution (in thousands), Fall 1980, 1989-90 & 1999-00.

| | Public | Private | For-profit | All 4-year | All 2-year | Less than 2-yr IHEs | More than 1 institution |
|---------------------|--------|---------|------------|------------|------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 1980 (all students) | 9,457 | 2,540 | 121 | 7,573 | 4,524 | N/A | N/A |
| 1990 | 9,728 | 2,148 | 822 | 6,625 | 5,365 | 708 | N/A |
| 2000 | 10,018 | 2,004 | 659 | 5,884 | 5,656 | 342 | 786 |

Sources: NCES Digest of Education Statistics: 1998; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1989-1990; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1999-2000.

Table 3: Undergraduate enrollment in postsecondary education by race, Fall 1980, 1989-90, & 1999-00.

| | White | African American, non-Latino | Latino | Asian | Native American | Pacific Islander | More than 1 race |
|------|-------|------------------------------|--------|-------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1980 | 82.7% | 9.9% | 4.2% | 2.4% | 0.8% | Included in Asian | N/A |
| 1990 | 75.9% | 10.2% | 8.4% | 4.7% | 0.8% | Included in Asian | N/A |
| 2000 | 66.6% | 12.2% | 11.5% | 5.2% | 0.9% | 0.8% | 2.2% |

Sources: NCES Digest of Education Statistics: 1998; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1989-1990; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1999-2000.

Table 4: Undergraduate enrollments by gender and attendance status, Fall 1980, 1989-90, & 1999-00.

| | Full-time | Part-time | Mixed full-time/part-time | Male | Female |
|------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------|-------|--------|
| 1980 | 60.7% | 39.5% | N/A | 47.7% | 52.3% |
| 1990 | 56% | 44% | N/A | 44.6% | 55.4% |
| 2000 | 49.3% | 34.5% | 16.3% | 43.7% | 56.3% |

Sources: NCES Digest of Education Statistics: 1998; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1989-1990; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1999-2000.

To be sure, data can be looked at in any number of ways. Although the percentage of white students has decreased and percentages of students of color has increased, it is also true that white students remain more likely than African American and Latinos to graduate from high school and enroll in college. African American and Latino students are more likely to attend two-year institutions and they are under-represented in public and private four-year institutions.

Table 5: High school graduation rates and enrollments of recent high school graduates, 1970-2000.

| Race | 2000 | 1995 | 1990 | 1985 | 1980 | 1975 | 1970 |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| White | | | | | | | |
| Grad rate | 87 | 86 | 88 | 88 | 87 | 86 | 84% |
| Enroll rate | 66 | 63 | 62 | 59 | 50 | 51 | 52 |
| African American | | | | | | | |
| Grad rate | 66 | 66 | 69 | 66 | 44 | 43 | 40 |
| Enroll rate | 55 | 51 | 46 | 42 | 42 | 42 | 45 |
| Latino | | | | | | | |
| Grad rate | 68 | 64 | 75 | 68 | 62 | 53 | NA |
| Enroll rate | 49 | 51 | 53 | 47 | 50 | 48 | 45 |

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, The Condition of Education, 2000, 2003.

Table 6: Undergraduate enrollment within racial/ethnic group by control of institution, 1980, 1989-90 & 1999-2000.

| Race | 1980 (all students) | | | 1990 | | | 2000 | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|---------|------------|--------|---------|------------|--------|---------|------------|
| | Public | Private | For-profit | Public | Private | For-profit | Public | Private | For-profit |
| White | 77.9 | 22.1 | N/A | 77.2 | 16.4 | 6.4 | 79.0 | 16.5 | 4.5% |
| African American, non Latino | 79.1 | 20.9 | N/A | 68.1 | 12.0 | 19.9 | 78.1 | 13.6 | 8.3 |
| Latino | 86.1 | 13.9 | N/A | 68.2 | 16.5 | 15.3 | 74.6 | 16.4 | 9.0 |
| Asian | 83.8 | 16.2 | N/A | 81.2 | 13.5 | 5.3 | 82.8 | 12.6 | 4.6 |
| Native Am. | 88.4 | 11.6 | N/A | 78.4 | 10.4 | 11.3 | 83.4 | 13.7 | 2.9 |
| Pacific Islander | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | 84.8 | 8.8 | 6.3 |
| Other | 67.0 | 33.0 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | 77.2 | 14.3 | 8.5 |
| More than 1 race | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | 72.4 | 21.3 | 6.3 |

Sources: NCES Digest of Education Statistics: 1998; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1989-1990; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1999-2000.

Table 7: Undergraduate enrollment by control of institution and race, 1980, 1989-90, & 1999-2000.

| Public | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| White | 82.7% | 77.4% | 75.0% |
| African American non-Latino | 9.5% | 9.2% | 11.1% |
| Latino | 4.4% | 7.6% | 6.2% |
| Asian | 2.6% | 5.0% | 6.3% |
| Native Am./Pacific Is. | 0.8% | 0.8% | 1.5% |
| Other | N/A | N/A | 6.2% |
| Private | | | |
| White | 86.1% | 78.9% | 76.4% |
| African American non-Latino | 9.1% | 7.8% | 10.6% |
| Latino | 2.6% | 8.8% | 5.2% |
| Asian | 1.8% | 4.0% | 4.5% |
| Native Am./Pacific Is. | 0.4% | 0.5% | 1.4% |
| Other | N/A | N/A | 7.0% |
| For-Profit | | | |
| White | N/A | 57.3% | 62.0% |
| African American non-Latino | N/A | 23.7% | 20.6% |
| Latino | N/A | 15.1% | 12.1% |
| Asian | N/A | 2.9% | 4.9% |
| Native Am./Pacific Is. | N/A | 1.0% | 1.6% |
| Other | N/A | N/A | 10.9% |

Sources: NCES Digest of Education Statistics: 1998; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1989-1990; NCES Profile of Undergraduates in U.S Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1999-2000.

Table 8: Distribution of full-time, dependent undergraduates by type of institution and family income, 1989-90 & 1999-00.

| | Lowest quarter | Lower middle quarter | Upper middle quarter | Highest quarter |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1989-90 | | | | |
| <i>Public 2-year</i> | 15.5% | 19.7% | 15.5% | 10.6% |
| <i>Public 4-year</i> | 52.4% | 53.5% | 56.4% | 52.4% |
| <i>Private</i> | 28.0% | 22.0% | 25.2% | 35.7% |
| <i>For-profit</i> | 4.1% | 4.0% | 2.9% | 1.3% |
| 1999-2000 | | | | |
| <i>Public 2-year</i> | 24.7% | 22.3% | 18.6% | 12.6% |
| <i>Public 4-year</i> | 47.4% | 51.9% | 51.7% | 53.9% |
| <i>Private</i> | 22.9% | 23.8% | 28.0% | 32.6% |
| <i>For-profit</i> | 5.0% | 2.0% | 1.7% | 0.9% |

Source: NCES Paying for college: Changes between 1990 and 2000 for full-time dependent undergraduates.

While there has been a slight increase in students of color attending private institutions, as with their Anglo counterparts, the overwhelming majority of all students attend public institutions.

The wealthiest students are more likely to attend four-year and private institutions. The poorest in society are less likely to attend a private institution today than a decade ago and their attendance at two-year institutions has increased. When one looks at attendance by wealth, one finds what might be anticipated: private and public four-year institutions have an over-representation of upper income students and two-year institutions have an over-representation of the poorest in society.

Table 9: Fall 2000 enrollment distribution of all students attending Title IV degree-granting institutions by race/ethnicity, and Carnegie Classification.

| Carnegie Classification | All students | White | African American, non-Latino | Latino | Asian | Native Am. | Race unknown | Non-resident alien |
|---|--------------|-------------|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Research I Extensive | 20.7% | 21.4% | 13.1% | 12.6% | 28.1% | 14.0% | 19.5% | 43.5% |
| Research II Intensive | 7.4% | 7.6% | 7.2% | 5.0% | 6.2% | 6.4% | 7.9% | 10.3% |
| Master's colleges I | 20.0% | 20.2% | 20.9% | 16.7% | 15.1% | 16.6% | 21.1% | 17.0% |
| Master's colleges II | 1.8% | 2.1% | 1.6% | 0.7% | 0.6% | 1.5% | 2.3% | 1.2% |
| Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts | 2.3% | 2.8% | 1.6% | 0.9% | 1.6% | 1.7% | 1.8% | 2.2% |
| Baccalaureate-General | 3.3% | 2.3% | 5.3% | 1.4% | 1.3% | 2.3% | 2.5% | 2.3% |
| Baccalaureate/Associate's | 0.8% | 0.9% | 0.8% | 0.6% | 0.5% | 0.6% | 0.5% | 0.5% |
| Other 4-year institutions | 1.2% | 1.0% | 1.3% | 0.9% | 1.1% | 0.9% | 3.6% | 0.6% |
| Associate's colleges | 38.5% | 36.2% | 40.9% | 58.0% | 41.3% | 44.6% | 35.6% | 16.8% |
| Other 2-year institutions | 1.0% | 0.9% | 1.5% | 0.9% | 0.5% | 1.7% | 1.0% | 0.3% |
| All other institutions (health, technology, tribal, etc.) | 3.1% | 4.6% | 5.8% | 2.3% | 3.7% | 9.7% | 4.2% | 5.3% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Source: NCES/IPEDS Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2000 and Financial Statistics, Fiscal Year 2000.

Table 10: Percentage distribution of full-time dependent undergraduates by type of institution, by family income, 1989-1990 and 1999-2000.

| Family Income | Public 2-year | Public 4-year | Private not-for-profit 4-year | Private for-profit less-than-4-year |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Total: 1989-1990 | 15.5 | 52.4 | 28.0 | 4.1 |
| <i>Lower quarter</i> | 16.4 | 47.0 | 28.0 | 8.7 |
| <i>Lower middle quarter</i> | 19.7 | 53.5 | 22.8 | 4.0 |
| <i>Upper middle quarter</i> | 15.5 | 56.4 | 25.2 | 2.9 |
| <i>Highest quarter</i> | 10.6 | 52.4 | 35.7 | 1.3 |
| Total: 1999-2000 | 19.4 | 51.3 | 27.0 | 4.1 |
| <i>Lower quarter</i> | 24.7 | 47.4 | 22.9 | 5.0 |
| <i>Lower middle quarter</i> | 22.3 | 51.9 | 23.8 | 2.0 |
| <i>Upper middle quarter</i> | 18.6 | 51.7 | 28.0 | 1.7 |
| <i>Highest quarter</i> | 12.6 | 53.9 | 32.6 | 0.9 |

Source: NCES Paying for college: Changes between 1990 and 2000 for full-time dependent undergraduates.

The conclusion one draws from these various tables is that the postsecondary terrain has not changed terrifically much over the last 20 years. Although the number of for-profit institutions is increasing dramatically, and over a twenty year time horizon their increase is significant, they remain a microscopic component of the postsecondary landscape and public higher education retains its predominance. Public higher education remains the central portal for all students regardless of race, gender, or income. More students of all races and incomes are attending college today than a generation ago, but discrepancies based on race and income remains readily apparent. Poorer students and students of color are disproportionately lodged in two-year and public institutions, whereas wealthy students and Anglo and Asian students attend four-year public and private institutions. If society did not demand a more educated citizenry, then one might be satisfied that incremental progress has been made and most likely will continue. If an increase in college-going is to occur, however, the change needs to take place with those populations that are under-represented. The two primary reasons for under-representation pertain to the cost of college and academic preparation. I first turn to cost.

Paying for college: One aspect of college life that has changed is the cost of college. Over the last 20 years the cost of attending a two-year, four-year and public or private institution as a percentage of family income has skyrocketed for low-income families.

What also has changed is the percentage of individuals receiving some form of financial aid. Although the poorest students are still the most likely to receive a grant, even the wealthiest students are twice as likely today to receive a grant compared to fifteen years ago. Indeed, the most significant increases in grants and financial aid over the last generation have been to those students in the upper income brackets who will receive merit aid. It warrants attention as well that nine out of 10 students who attend a for-profit college will receive some form of financial aid, most likely from the federal government in the form of loans.

Table 11: Cost of tuition over 30 years, 1982-83, 1992-93, and 2002-03 in constant 2003 dollars.

| | Four Year Private Institution | Four Year Public Institution | Two Year Public Institution |
|---------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1982-83 | \$8,692 | \$1,932 | \$886 |
| 1992-93 | \$13,481 | \$3,012 | \$1,440 |
| 2002-03 | \$18,779 | \$4155 | \$1,690 |

Source: The College Board. (2003). Trends in College Pricing.

Table 12: Average tuition and fees (in 1999 constant dollars) and percent change for full-time, dependent undergraduates, by institutional type, 1989-90 & 1999-00.

| Institutional type | 1989-90 | 1999-00 | Percent Change |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------------|
| <i>Public 2-yr</i> | \$1,100 | \$1,600 | 45% |
| <i>Public 4-yr</i> | \$2,900 | \$4,300 | 48% |
| <i>Private</i> | \$12,000 | \$15,900 | 33% |
| <i>For-profit</i> | \$7,300 | \$8,000 | 10% |

Source: NCES Paying for college: Changes between 1990 and 2000 for full-time dependent undergraduates.

Table 13: Percentage of full-time, dependent undergraduates who received grants by family income, 1989-90 & 1999-00.

| Family income | 1989-90 | 1999-00 |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|
| <i>Lowest quarter</i> | 77% | 84% |
| <i>Lower middle quarter</i> | 49% | 60% |
| <i>Upper middle quarter</i> | 37% | 48% |
| <i>Highest quarter</i> | 20% | 39% |

Source: NCES Paying for college: Changes between 1990 and 2000 for full-time dependent undergraduates.

How students pay for college also has changed. There has been a decided movement from grants to loans at the same time that there has been a declining purchasing value of Pell grants. Pell grants, for example, once paid for 77 percent of tuition, fees, and on-campus room and board at public four-year institutions and 36 percent at a private not for profit institution. Today, the maximum grant covers 41 percent at a four-year public and 16 percent at a four-year

private. Even in two-year colleges the change is significant. In 1979 Pell Grants covered 99 percent of the cost whereas today the maximum grant covers slightly more than two-thirds of the cost (King, 2003).

Table 14: Types of aid used to finance postsecondary education expenses (constant 2002 dollars) 1982-83, 1992-93, 2002-03.

| | 1982-83 | 1992-93 | 2002-03 |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Federal Grants | 32.3% | 24.2% | 13.2% |
| Federal Work Study | 3.8% | 2.3% | 3.2% |
| Federal Loans | 46% | 46.7% | 45.4% |
| Education Tax Grants | NA | NA | 5.4% |
| State Grants | 6.1% | 6.1% | 5.4% |
| Institutional Grants | 12% | 21% | 19.4% |
| State Loans | NA | NA | .6% |
| Private Loans | NA | NA | 6.6% |

Source: The College Board. (2003). Trends in Student Aid.

Table 15: Use of loans versus grants to finance postsecondary education expenses (constant 2002 dollars), 1982-83, 1992-93, 2002-03*.

| | 1982-83 | 1992-93 | 2002-03 |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Federal, State & Institutional Grants | 50.4% | 51.3% | 40.4% |
| Federal Loans | 46% | 46.7% | 45.4% |

*Total amounts do not add up to 100%. There are other forms of financial aid that are not included here, such as private funding and tax credits.

Source: The College Board. (2003). Trends in Student Aid.

As I will discuss below, the shift from grants to loans for paying for college represents a significant challenge to increasing access. When the poorest citizens are expected to assume debt for something whose goal is nebulous (e.g. a bachelor's degree), then one wonders about the viability of setting a target of dramatically increasing access to college without consideration of financial aid. If a college degree is a private good, then presumably the consumer should bear the majority of the cost; however, if the assumption is that in order to remain economically competitive the country needs an educated citizenry, then consideration needs to be given about who should shoulder the burden for the costs of college. The other concern pertains to academic preparation, achievement, and retention.

Academic preparation: If one only investigated raw numbers, then there is cause for a degree of optimism. The number of students who take advanced placement courses and examinations has increased exponentially. What is not clear is whether students taking these examinations pass them at a greater rate than a generation ago.

When students arrive on campus, they are less likely to take remedial courses today than before, and remedial course taking by race has dropped as well, except for Latinos—which remains troubling. However, one-third of all students still take remedial classes, and close to two-thirds of African Americans and Latinos, which is a cause for concern. When students take a remedial course in college the likelihood of their eventually earning a B.A. drops dramatically.

Table 16: Participation in the AP program, 1980, 1990, & 2003.

| | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 |
|------------------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| Number of students | 119,918 | 330,080 | 768,586 |
| Number of examinations | 160,214 | 490,299 | 1,272,317 |
| Number of schools | 4,950 | 9,292 | 13,253 |

Source: College Examination Board. (2001). Access to Excellence: A Report on the Future of the Advanced Placement Program.

Table 17: Percentage of students taking remedial courses in 1982, 1992.

| | 1 or more remedial course | No remedial courses |
|------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1982 | 50.6% | 49.3% |
| 1992 | 41.4% | 58.6% |

Source: Adelman, C. (2004). Principal Indicators of Student Academic Histories in Postsecondary Education 1972-2000.

Table 18: Percentage of students taking remedial courses by race/ethnicity in 1982, 1992.

| | White | African American | Latino | Asian |
|---------------------------|-------|------------------|--------|-------|
| Class of 1982 | | | | |
| 1 or more remedial course | 47% | 72% | 63.2% | 51.3% |
| No remedial courses | 53% | 28% | 36.8% | 48.7% |
| Class of 1992 | | | | |
| 1 or more remedial course | 36% | 61.7% | 63.2% | 38% |
| No remedial courses | 64% | 38.3% | 36.8% | 62% |

Source: Adelman, C. (2004). Principal Indicators of Student Academic Histories in Postsecondary Education 1972-2000.

Figure 1: Transition to college risk factors.

| "Transition to College" Risk Factors | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change of schools two or more times from 1st to 8th grade • Membership in the lowest SES quartile • Average grades of C's or lower from 6th to 8th grade • Single parent household in 8th grade • One or more older siblings left high school • Held back one or more grades from 1st to 8th grade | |

Source: NCES National Education Longitudinal Study of 1998, 3rd Follow-up (NELS: 1988/1994).

Further, two types of risk indicators might be thought of for undergraduate students. One form of risk pertains to entering undergraduate students and the second form relates to current and continuing undergraduates. The "transition to college" set of risk factors addresses activities that have occurred prior to enrollment into postsecondary education. These factors are noted in Figure 1.

When one analyzes these risk factors and looks at a complete class of students, the following picture emerges.

A similar portrait may be drawn with undergraduates. A finite list of risks may be developed and a significant majority of students have experienced them.

Figure 2: Risk factor experiences - class of 1992.

| Risk Factor Experiences - Class of 1992 |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 42.2% experienced no risk factors • 57.8% did experience risk factors • 32.3% experienced only one risk factor • The most common risk factors experienced were: (1) changed schools two or more times from 1st to 8th grade (26.8%), (2) participation in lowest SES quartile (18.2%), and (3) Average grades of C's or lower from 6th to 8th grade (16.7%). |

Source: NCES National Education Longitudinal Study of 1998, 3rd Follow-up (NELS: 1988/1994).

Figure 3: Risks factors related to college retention.

| Risks Factors Related to College Retention | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delayed enrollment • part-time attendance • financially independent • have dependent or children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • single parent • no high school diploma • work full time while enrolled |

Source: NCES 1999-2000 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study.

Table 19: Average time to degree for the classes of 1972, 1982, and 1992 by ethnicity and overall.

| | Class of 1972 | Class of 1982 | Class of 1992 |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| White | 4.32 years | 4.44 years | 4.51 years |
| African American | 4.39 years | 4.57 years | 4.67 years |
| Latino | 5.07 years | 4.66 years | 5.11 years |
| Asian | 4.5 years | 4.61 years | 4.61 years |
| Overall | 4.57 years | 4.57 years | 4.73 years |

Source: Adelman, C. (2004). Principal Indicators of Student Academic Histories in Postsecondary Education, 1972-2000.

Degree attainment takes longer today than a generation ago, regardless of race or institutional type. High-income students are much more likely to graduate than low-income students, and African American and Latino students are equally less likely to graduate than their Anglo counterparts (Carnevale and Rose, 2004). Degree attainment is lower because proportionally fewer low income and minority students enter academe, and fewer of them graduate if they have entered (Garcia, Jorgensen and Ormsby, 1999).

Student preference for majors also has shifted, especially among students of color. Education as a field of study is much less preferred as a major today than a generation ago, whereas an interest in engineering has increased. Students of color remain under-represented in the life sciences. Women remain under-represented in science and engineering, and 1st generation students continue to lack proportional representation in the physical and life sciences despite national and state efforts such as MESA.

The snapshot of cost and academic preparation/retention is intended to provoke neither cause for celebration nor dismay. Clearly, college costs more today than a generation ago; the assumption is that the individual should bear the cost of his or her education. A national commitment to help individuals pay for college has lessened—except through enabling students to accumulate debt. Students appear a bit more academically prepared for college than a generation ago, even though it takes them slightly longer to graduate and they remain unequipped with the requisite skills to enter a globalized marketplace. A majority of entering and continuing students also experience risk with regard to college retention. In effect, students are slightly more prepared, but the exit skills needed upon graduation have risen and the need for manpower has increased. A discrepancy also exists based on race and income about whether individuals will ultimately attain a degree. However, my point in this section has not been to simply delineate trends to describe the postsecondary landscape today, but also to provide the scaffolding for a discussion about how to plan for the future given what has been outlined.

Table 20: College majors and degrees awarded, classes of 1972, 1982, and 1992, by ethnicity.

| | White | | | African American | | | Latino | | | Asian | | |
|---|-------|------|------|------------------|------|------|--------|------|------|-------|------|------|
| | 72 | 82 | 92 | 72 | 82 | 92 | 72 | 82 | 92 | 72 | 82 | 92 |
| Business & Allied fields | 17.3 | 26.5 | 17.4 | 16.5 | 26.2 | 15.5 | 11.7 | 19.8 | 14.7 | 21.8 | 17.3 | 14.9 |
| Education | 16.2 | 6.7 | 9.4 | 21.9 | 5.9 | 6.1 | 15.0 | 6.4 | 8.5 | 10.1 | 0.8 | 1.9 |
| Engineering, Architecture, Math, Physical & Computer sciences | 10.9 | 17.5 | 12.2 | 5.4 | 14.6 | 23.2 | 5.8 | 17.6 | 16.1 | 22.2 | 28.5 | 17.8 |
| Life Sciences & Agriculture | 8.7 | 5.7 | 7.9 | 5.9 | 6.9 | 4.7 | 8.1 | 5.4 | 7.8 | 10.6 | 19.7 | 18.4 |
| Health Services | 7.5 | 6.5 | 7.7 | 6.9 | 6 | 7.3 | 8.6 | 3.9 | 3.8 | 7.0 | 3.1 | 7.7 |
| Arts & Humanities | 11.3 | 11.3 | 13 | 9.3 | 5.5 | 11.8 | 13.5 | 10.1 | 10.3 | 7.0 | 7.1 | 9.0 |
| Social sciences | 26.1 | 25.8 | 30.5 | 33.4 | 32.4 | 31.3 | 36.2 | 33.5 | 29.6 | 20.7 | 23.4 | 30.1 |
| Other | 2.3 | 1.0 | 1.8 | 0.6 | 2.3 | 0.1 | 1.1 | 3.4 | 9.8 | 0.6 | 0.2 | 0.2 |

Source: Adelman, C. (2004). Principal Indicators of Student Academic Histories in Postsecondary Education 1972-2000.

The Challenges of the Changing Postsecondary Landscape

What do these academic pieces of a puzzle suggest about the future of higher education? And how might these trends impact the way the admission process functions? To consider these questions, I first suggest four trends that are likely to increase based on the data suggested in part one; I then turn to the implications for college and university admission.

New entrants to the postsecondary market:

Although for-profit colleges and universities are likely to remain secondary players in the academic marketplace, they are not going away. Their impact will be much more significant than their market share indicates. As noted in part one, for-profits receive a great deal of federal support through grants and loans to their students. Many institutions receive as much as 90 percent of their operating support through tuition dollars supported by federal monies. Even though for-profits are small, their lobbying power in Congress is significant. For-profit leaders are currently arguing that the Higher Education Reauthorization Act should eliminate several provisions that make it difficult for proprietary institutions to gain even greater access to federal monies. My point here is not to suggest that such changes are good or bad. Instead, if these changes come into being, then traditional colleges and universities are likely to receive even less federal support than they currently do, insofar as there is little likelihood that federal support will increase. The result will be that current federal dollars once intended in large part for public postsecondary education will be available to a greater pool of providers.

An additional significant impact of for-profits will be the manner in which delivery and services are provided to consumers. For-profits are among the most innovative postsecondary providers that

have ever entered the marketplace. Consider, for example, the 1960s—a decade that many scholars of higher education consider to be among the most experimental of times in American higher education in the twentieth century (Jencks and Reisman, 1969). New institutions arose that experimented with curricula, majors, course offerings and the like. Experimental colleges, or units within universities, catered to individuals and groups in ways that had not previously been done. The College of the Atlantic, Hampshire College, Evergreen State College, the University of California at Santa Cruz, the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay are all examples of institutions that tried to break the academic mold.

Two points are of interest. First, by the end of the twentieth century, the experiments that seemed so radical when they began had pretty much regressed to the norm, or were eliminated. Second, the changes, in hindsight, were less revolutionary than they were alterations of a standard structure. Although new majors arrived such as Women's Studies, and new ways of grading and assessment were developed such as those used at Evergreen State, the over-riding structure of American higher education was remarkably unchanged. Tenure track faculty offered classes to traditionally aged students in terms that covered an academic year. Students applied to college in the fall of their senior year and admissions offices created an incoming class of new students based on set criteria a few months later. College life began for students in the fall when they arrived on a campus. Students attended college for four years and, after they had taken a requisite number of course units, they were deemed eligible to graduate. Colleges and universities received accreditation from regional and professional associations. Although I do not believe the

The poorest in society are less likely to attend a private institution today than a decade ago and their attendance at two-year institutions has increased.



experiments were failures, as deviations from the norm, they were quite meager. The experiments fit within pre-existing academic structures.

Enter for-profit colleges and universities. There are virtually no full-time faculty, and tenure is non-existent. Semesters, quarters or academic terms in large part have given way to courses beginning and ending based on the completion of core course requirements. Students are able to begin and complete courses when they desire. The institutions still provide degrees, but the fastest growing segment of higher education is certificate-based coursework that has been in large part powered by for-profit and corporate universities. Students are generally admitted the day they apply and make their enrollment deposit. The age of the student is irrelevant. For-profits are also more diverse than most traditional institutions; half of their students are minorities, half are women, all age groups are represented, and there is a mixture of full- and part-time constituencies. Students are as likely to take courses in an office building or in cyberspace as they are on a campus. Accreditation remains important, but not as essential as in traditional postsecondary education.

Again, I make no claim to the quality of such experiments, but when compared to those of the 1960s, what is taking place at for-profit colleges and universities appears to be quite far-reaching organizational changes. These changes may have significant implications for traditional postsecondary providers. Indeed, the impact already has begun. The usage of terms such as “marketplace,” “consumers,” or “providers” would have seemed strange if not anathema even a decade ago. Today such words are commonplace, and in large part they have come into the vernacular because of these new entrants.

The organizational forms and affiliations of for-profits also are at variance with traditional institutions. The assumption had been that all institutions had to have regional and professional accreditation if they were to survive. For-profits have brought accreditation into question and, in many instances, they have demonstrated they have little interest in it. Professional associations such as American Council on Education (ACE), National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC), and the American Association of Universities (AAU) have played an important role for traditional institutions, yet appear irrelevant for for-profits. The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), and the like have been commonplace organizations for professionals to join who work in traditional colleges and universities. For-profits in general have eschewed membership in such organizations and the organizations have not sought them out. The result is that there appears to be a good deal of disdain between those who work in traditional postsecondary education and those in for-profit colleges and universities. For-profits look on traditional institutions as old-fashioned and out-of-step. Traditional institutions view for-profits as infidels who are trying to enter the monastery. Perhaps a better strategy for both groups is to move from disdain to détente. For-profit institutions are here to stay. Why not assume that both groups have much to learn from one another and consider avenues for communication that will be of mutual benefit?

If an increase in college-going is to occur, however, the change needs to take place with those populations that are under-represented.



Distance learning and the way students learn:

Although I suggested earlier that over the next 10–20 years there will not be much change in who provides postsecondary education and training, the manner in which teaching and learning are configured will undergo a sea-change. Until recently, distance learning was most frequently mentioned as an efficient and cost-effective tool to provide education to the masses. Individuals made far-reaching predictions about how distance learning was going to revolutionize academe, and those predictions have failed to materialize. Indeed, most traditional institutions that have tried to create significant Web-based courses and courseware have ended these endeavors in aborted efforts or failures.

However, the discourse pertaining to distance learning is about to change. Rather than be thought of as a tool to make education cheaper, distance learning will be seen as a way to enhance teaching and learning. Advances in understanding about individuals' cognitive capabilities have clarified that individuals learn in radically different manners, and that different learning environments stimulate individuals in different ways. And yet, up until today, the modalities for teaching and learning have been rigid. A teacher stands in front of a classroom and lectures, or perhaps offers a seminar in the Socratic style. Once again, ideas such as 'cooperative learning' or 'service learning' are seen as dramatic experiments, when in actuality they are slight variations on a standard theme of apprenticeship, volunteerism or on-the-job training.

To be sure, such experiments are frequently worthwhile. Distance learning, however, has the potential to revolutionize learning because of its ability to customize courses to meet the needs of

the students. Customizing courses implies more than simply offering a class at a convenient time or location. Rather, distance learning will soon have the capability to offer a menu of modalities that students can tap into that will best meet their learning needs. Some students learn quite well via the lecture method, but others are better learners when they are actively involved in their learning; some need to see material sequentially in order to process it, and others only grow confused from linear methods. Some students are likely to learn better with short bursts of intensive interactive sessions, while an optimal learning experience for others is when it extends over a long period of time. Previously, there has been inadequate understanding of learning sequences so that even if such technology existed, it could not have been used. Of course, the technology did not exist. Indeed, to suggest that learning be customized in such a way even today would be a registrar's nightmare. How can classes be scheduled for thousands of students if it is to be customized?

Just because such a question cannot be answered today does not mean that it will not be implemented tomorrow. The stimuli for such change are not simply the rise of non-traditional institutions. Advances in learning theory, the revolution in technology, and changes in the manner in which corporations and organizations function all have created possibilities for postsecondary institutions that would have been thought of as fanciful only a generation ago. When such changes take place, the implications for admissions will be equally significant. Discussions will change from current pedestrian concerns about whether to have applications entirely on-line or how to market using the Web and Internet. The SAT becomes an outmoded tool for assessing student abilities because the way to assess

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learning will have changed. The focus, then, will become less a debate over the efficacy of the SAT and its ability to predict college performance (Fleming and Garcia, 1998; MacGowan, 2002; Rothstein, 2004; Sedlacek, 2004) and more about considering student cognitive learning styles. The result will be that the application for admission to an institution will need to be much more sophisticated than what currently exists.

Access to college: Those individuals who are least willing to take out loans are the poor. First generation families are also the least likely to receive the benefits of a college education when compared with immediate employment after graduation from high school (Caliber Associates, 2003). State economies function in tandem with the federal economy, so it is no surprise that as the federal deficit has ballooned, states such as California have teetered toward bankruptcy. Another part of the story is the decline in tax revenues. The result is not simply that public institutions have seen their budgets slashed. Outreach programs have been dramatically scaled back so that fewer students are being informed about the benefits of college and how to apply for admission. State funding for public education also has been cut and one consequence is that in many inner city schools the student to counselor ratio approaches 800:1. Although significant advances have been made in providing information about college on the web, low-income students frequently do not have computer access available to them at home, and schools have limited facilities available only during off-hours. Low-income parents have even fewer opportunities to use the Internet, and language facility is an additional hurdle.

The result is that students and parents who most need mentoring and support about navigating the college admissions process receive the least information. By the end of the ninth grade, one may predict what kind of institution a student will be likely to attend based on the courses he or she has taken through the academic year; however, in low-income schools and neighborhoods, discussions about college are more likely not to take place until a student's junior or senior year. Financial aid remains a mystery for low-income students and their families, and even those pre-financial aid costs (e.g. application fees, SAT charges) are usually not considered until they are immediately in front of the potential applicant. The result is that students are not adequately prepared to consider what kind of institution best suits them, and how to ensure they have a chance to get admitted. Even when students and parents receive advice through informational sessions, this format is neither systematic nor sustained.

At the same time, a stated commitment to access and equity creates a buyer's market for those few talented individuals who excel. Institutions vie for the brilliant African American student from an inner-city school, or the talented Native American from a rural reservation. While one may certainly understand why institutions desire the same individuals, the result is that rather than increasing access, the same students are simply being competed for time and again. Although such actions are neither unwarranted nor unethical, long-term strategies need to be developed that function in a systematic manner throughout a student's middle school and high school career—if increasing access is a primary goal. Rather than fight over the "talented tenth," strategies need to be devised that expand the potential pool of college applicants. As I will discuss below, new

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relationships need to be forged between post-secondary institutions and local schools to enable the success of these strategies.

The public good: A curious trend is that American citizens increasingly believe that a college education is essential and that it is not only of benefit to the individual but to the country. At the same time, public support for higher education, as defined by financial aid and state appropriations to public higher education institutions, continues to slip. Loans are offered more than grants, and in the hyper-competitive atmosphere that pervades most of American life, institutions increasingly have turned to merit aid as a way to induce the best students to choose one institution over another (Kane, 2003). The quest for higher institutional rankings has lessened a concern for access. As Roger Geiger has noted, the marketization of higher education has resulted in competition and “merit has ascended the selectivity hierarchy” (2004, 117). From a fiscal perspective, the result is a redefinition of the public good. The classic idea of the public good where a service is provided to all individuals irrespective of wealth or class has been redefined in such a manner where higher education is becoming a privatized commodity. The clearest example of such a change is in California where the long cherished Master Plan that assured all high school graduates a place in postsecondary education was reconfigured because of pervasive budget shortfalls and an increasing population desirous of a college education. The UC system, for example, had to scramble to find more seats for 5,700 students who were eligible, but were originally rerouted to community college (Davies, 2004).

Further, public policies that sought to enable previously excluded individuals and groups to gain access to college have eroded. Even though the

Supreme Court has maintained that affirmative action is a viable approach to increasing under-represented groups on campus, the policy has in large part fallen into disfavor. The result, in such states as Texas and California, is that proportional representation is less today than a decade ago. Texas AandM University, for example, has seen its minority population drop from 18.8 percent of freshmen enrollments in 1995 to 12.6 percent of freshmen enrollments in 2003—while at the same time the minority population in the state has increased (Arnone, 2004). Some states, such as Florida, California, and Colorado, have experimented with “percentage plans” (Shushok, 2001). In every instance where percentage plans have been implemented, however, they have fallen short of their goals (Horn and Flores, 2003).

Ironically, increased competition can be thought of as beneficial to those who are on the front lines of America's colleges and universities—faculty, admission officers, and senior administrators. When there is more competition for a particular degree, the assumption is that the quality of those who enter academe will rise. Insofar as one indicator of quality is the percentage of students who are rejected and admitted, is it not to an institution's benefit that more applicants want to enter a UC this year than last year? A successful applicant pool enables the institution to proclaim that they were able to only admit “x” percent this year rather than the higher “y” percent last year. Does it not make sense to develop strategies such as early decision to force the hand of the very best students, thereby assuring quality to rise even further (Avery, Fairbanks, and Zeckhauser, 2003; Steinberg, 2002)?

While it may make organizational sense, the result is in conflict with the goal of increasing

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access. In effect, two pressures are at odds with a public need: fewer public resources and proactive public policies suggest that the ability for the postsecondary sector to serve more students will be daunting, if not impossible. At the same time, as postsecondary institutions become more market-oriented, their goal becomes less to develop ways to increase access and more toward developing strategic plans that enable them to increase not necessarily their market share, but instead the quality of the product—the student.

Reclaiming the Future for the Public Good

Any claims for a panacea where the challenge of access will no longer be an issue or suggestions that one group can resolve the significant challenges I have outlined would be foolhardy. Increasing access to college is a long-term undertaking that necessitates the involvement of multiple constituencies. Those who are members of NACAC, however, have a particularly critical role to play. Few other constituencies are as knowledgeable about what takes place in high schools as well as colleges and universities. Admissions officers certainly need to be responsive to their senior administrations and the faculty, but college presidents and professors rarely set foot in a high school unless it is to see their son or daughter participate in a school event. Similarly, high school counselors' work rarely takes them outside of the halls of a school, but few other personnel in the high schools are as informed about what colleges and universities need. Accordingly, given what I have delineated, four inter-related suggestions are germane.

Forge inter-segmental partnerships: A hallmark of the twentieth century was that within the postsecondary sector colleges and universities

tried to become more alike than different, and a firewall existed between K-12 and postsecondary education. A hierarchy existed where those on the lower rung tried to become more like those higher up (state colleges became state universities, etc). Postsecondary institutions also exhibited little desire to have any relationship with their K-12 counterparts. As noted above, non-traditional institutions (e.g. proprietary institutions) also had little communication with traditional colleges and universities.

If access is to increase, the twenty-first century has to see different relationships created. Postsecondary institutions need to develop long-standing partnerships with schools and with non-traditional postsecondary institutions. Such relationships have to be more than a simple handshake between a college president and a high school principal at graduation, or documents signed by senior administrators but never utilized by those who work in the academic trenches. Math professors, for example, could benefit from understanding the challenges that math teachers face and vice versa. If admission to college were a seamless exercise, rather than a prize to be denied some and awarded to others, then a dramatic increase in preparation and access would occur.

As suggested earlier, traditional institutions and for-profit colleges and universities need to move from disdain to détente. The point is not that traditional colleges and universities ought to adopt the business model of the for-profit sector, or that for-profits should turn themselves into traditional institutions. However, to ignore one another seems mistaken, if not foolhardy. Both sectors have much to learn from one another and working together is likely not only to improve institutional performance but also will improve the postsecondary system in general.

College admission officers would provide an enormous service if postsecondary institutions coordinated with one another to offer a series of progressive seminars in every high school in their area.



Develop successful, systematic college preparation programs: A well-meaning cottage industry has developed that seeks to equip students in low-income schools with the skills necessary for applying to, and thriving in, college. The justifiable assumption of these programs is that the schools are not able to help those students who need the most help. AVID, PUENTE, MESA, and Upward Bound are examples of the kind of programs that have the goal of increasing access to college. Initiatives also may be “one-shot” opportunities that occur because an agency has a particular focus for a year, or money has been received from a foundation for a special project.

The problem with college preparation programs is that despite their good intentions, there is little valid research that demonstrates that the programs are successful. More importantly, even though those who work in these programs make valiant efforts, their reach is minimal. The programs are relatively small, under funded, and most do not last. The result is that frequently less than 10 percent of a school’s population benefit from college preparation programs.

Such observations should not be construed as pessimistic. Over the last decade a great deal of research has been done that outlines what works and what does not (e.g. Tierney, W.G. and Hagedorn, L.S. (2002); Tierney, W.G., Colyar, J.E. and Corwin, Z.B. (2003); Tierney, W.G., Venegas, K.M., Corwin, Z.B., Colyar, J.E. and Oliverez, P.M. (2004)). A key to successful college preparation is that the programs are long-standing, begin by the eighth or ninth grade, and they focus on academic achievement. As noted above, the key indicator for student success in college is that they are academically prepared.

There is no reason why a school and college cannot work out a systematic plan for college preparation that utilizes multiple constituencies (e.g. math faculty, graduate students, and admissions staff) aimed at increasing achievement in math and reading. Although resources for such a program are necessary, the larger issue is one of commitment and time.

Create sustained and systematic seminars about applying to college and acquiring financial aid: Applying to college is a fundamentally different activity than those I have just outlined. Unfortunately, under-served populations experience the same problems when they consider applying to college as they do with preparing for college. In addition to the critical information about which courses to take in high school and the like, a variety of topics need to be discussed with students and their families as soon as they enter high school. If the workforce needs that I outlined in part one are correct, then high school needs to be viewed more as preparation for college rather than as an end unto itself. Such a view necessitates actions not only on the academic level, but also in providing students and families with the requisite skills and knowledge to navigate the college application process.

College admission officers would provide an enormous service if postsecondary institutions coordinated with one another to offer a series of progressive seminars in every high school in their area. The objective of the seminars would be to explain the in’s and out’s of applying to college and how to get financial aid without incurring a mountain of debt. Several admirable attempts are being made, but again, more often than not the actions are not sustained or long-standing, and they reach but a fragment of the eligible pool of



The challenge is to empower students and their families to make the right choice, and once that choice is made, to ensure that students have the requisite academic and socio-emotional skills to succeed, and that they understand how to navigate the application process and pay for college.

potential applicants. In addition, scam artists are proliferating that provide students with negligible information and use up scarce dollars.

The challenge of triangulation: I began this text by pointing out how, although one may analyze access to college from multiple perspectives, at its base the most fundamental way to think of admission is via the triumvirate of the college admissions office, the high school counselor, and the student. Ostensibly, each constituency has the same goal: to enable the individual to get into college. However, in the 21st century, on occasions each individual or group might have a different goal. I noted earlier how postsecondary institutions are now in a market economy where competition has become paramount; certain kinds of students—such as academically prepared students of color—are in short supply. The temptation may exist to do what is in the best interest of the institution—increase the minority presence on campus, increase SAT averages, etc.—but in doing so, the admission officer has not done what is in the best interest of the student. At times, for example, a student may be better served at a less prestigious institution; however, when a premier institution woos the student, he or she may make the wrong choice. Further, when intense efforts are focused on the same students, then little is being done other than shuffling students from one institution to another rather than increasing the presence of under-represented students on campuses everywhere.

Counselors may face the same dilemma. School reputations rise and fall on the ability of students to get into college. Even in low-income urban public schools, there is an impetus to report “good” news about the number of students who are off to college. The more prestigious the

institution the better the news will be. Although I am not suggesting that schools should aim low, or reduce a student’s desire to go to an academically rigorous four-year institution, the decision about where someone should go for college should always be based on what is in the best interest of the student.

I am arguing that the over-riding concern should always be in helping students and their families make the decision that is right for the student. The challenge is to empower students and their families to make the right choice, and once that choice is made, to ensure that students have the requisite academic and socio-emotional skills to succeed, and that they understand how to navigate the application process and pay for college. Such challenges are considerable, but they are not impossible. The solution lies in a coordinated, sustained effort and a reinvigorated commitment to the public good.

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